

WAPOOSE

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And now does Wapoose come forth; Wapoose the rabbit-jester to grim King Hunger's court. Doffed is the brown of his summer garb and ermine is not whiter than the coat he wears. A vain fellow is this Wapoose, vain and a fool withal, though he stamp his snow-shoe feet so bravely on the packed game trail. There will be a scream of terror presently along that trail and Wapoose will have had his day.

For the wolverine catches the marten and the marten can find the squirrel; the she-fox waits by the musk-rat run, patient and empty too. The lynx must steal from the Indian's trap and himself be eaten in a snare. There could well be famine among the ruthless ones had Fate not made Wapoose a multitude and with no cunning in his head.

WAPOOSE

The new telegrapher was the only passenger on the mail-sleigh the evening it arrived, so I could not miss him. I extended an official welcome and led him into his future office and quarters that shared the same building with the postoffice. He seemed a friendly eager little chap in his early twenties and gave the promise of being more companionable than the old crab who preceeded him. I lighted the lamp and filled up his stove, since I had been carrying the office key for the past week. Meantime he was looking about, all wonder and interest, at his official residence. The living room was a cubby-hole at the rear; it smelled faintly of age and dissolution and was littered up with all manner of wreckage, probably flung about by the old operator to relieve his feelings. I mentioned it unfavorably. But everything was all right with the new man, much better than he had expected. He understood that conditions would be primitive in such a place and wouldn't give it a thought. And by-the-way, his name was Halliday and what was mine? I told him.

"Lynch!" he exclaimed. "How appropriate; a Mounted Policeman with that name and stationed down here on the raw fringe of civilization. It fits completely, doesn't it?"

"I inherited it," I said.

He smiled. "Of course. But I mean the chance that brought you here to this position you occupy; the combination of your name and your situation, is perfect. It's impossible to imagine you as anything else than an officer of the Mounted Police."

I let it pass, though I looked at him carefully. He seemed guileless enough, smiling up at me. His clothes were in his favor, all new apparently from the beaver cap to moccasins. He had on diamond-gartered woollen socks and mackinaw knickers that looked made to measure as did his coat. Both were red checked in a pattern that could not be called less than pronounced. Nobody with such an investment in clothes would have come out there with light ideas in his mind. And there was no time to pursue the subject further for I had ordered supper for both of us and Louis Papineau was apt to be noisy if we were late.

"Let's go to the hotel," I suggested, "and see what we can find to eat."

"Hotel? But I understood Athabasca Landing was just a village."

"This is only a stopping-house actually," I explained, as we got outside, "but Louis is proud and vainglorious. He calls it a hotel."

He said he was fascinated by the inside of the gloomy, half-lit dining room. "It's built of logs too, isn't it?"

"Everything is down here."

"I had hoped they would be," he said. "I wanted especially to be sent to a place like this; all the

primitive life stirs me immensely. And such strong types among the people; like yourself, Mr. Lynch."

"It's fat in my case. I always beef up in the winter."

"But I noticed the men we met on the trail between here and Edmonton. There was a sturdy rugged look about them all. Their teams and sleighs were hauling trade goods, the driver explained, and I imagine they are not greatly different from the men who drove the old Red River carts in the early days."

I hadn't heard about them at the time but before I could ask him Louis Papineau had discovered us waiting there and come into the dining room.

"This is Mr. Halliday, Louis," I said by way of introducing him. "He's the new telegraph operator and if you spread yourself tonight you may catch him for a steady boarder. Since there is no other place to eat," I added to Halliday.

Louis' smile was ten teeth wide when he wanted to be agreeable and he showed us that he did. "W'at you like it, hein? Dat little white bean, she's mak de gran' pea soup. 'You like dat?'"

It is commonly understood that the French are famous cooks but I suspect that refers to Frenchmen that come from France. Louis was a Quebec Frenchman and he'd made a success of trapping in the winter and cutting railroad ties in summer back in Manitoba. That's a good honest calling of course, but it could not be said to especially prepare a man for running an eating-house. Louis sim-

ply hadn't the touch and his Indian woman was little better, which may have been the reason they chose a place that offered no competition. But the young telegrapher banked his fire with Louis' grub and had no fault to find with it. Indeed when I accused our host of having added moose meat to his beef stew, and he admitted it, Halliday was pleased and asked for more.

"This fellow's great, isn't he?" Halliday remarked in Louis' absence.

"He has his points," I admitted, "but you couldn't say cooking is among them."

"I wasn't thinking of that, it's no more or less than one would expect out here. But the fellow himself is a character; one of the adventurous sort that gravitates to the frontier, wherever it is, don't you think so?"

"Louis likes the freedom of it out here. He's been more or less with the Government for the past few years, on the quiet of course."

"How do you mean—a secret agent among the Indians?"

"No. . . . I wouldn't mention it, you know, except that Louis himself tells it quite freely. But the fact is he spent a term in the Manitoba penitentiary just before coming here."

The information greatly interested Halliday. "It doesn't surprise me though. One of the hot-blooded impetuous kind; the sort to do violence. I suppose he knifed somebody?"

"Not exactly," I said, "Louis was a tie-hacker back there, selling to some railroad contractor and

he worked out a plan for selling the same ties twice. Not to the same contractor you understand, which wouldn't be unusual I believe. But Louis was selling the same ties to two outfits and that seems to be frowned on in the best tie-hacking circles. I don't see the difference myself but Louis was embarrassed considerably by it."

I had no intention of doing Louis' reputation any actual damage but I had been hearing him tell it so often and in so many different ways that I thought it wouldn't hurt to give the real version once in a while. The point didn't seem to register with young Halliday however. "I shouldn't think any the less of him," he declared. "And things like that are not so important out here, are they?"

"Well . . . people are more or less prejudiced against thieving and such tricks," I insisted. "In fact, the laws flatly forbid it."

"No, no; I mean in a moral and social sense a man's past would be relatively unimportant. The vital thing out here is not who one is or what one has done but what one can do, isn't it? A country like this would need hardy energetic men for the work of subduing the vast wilderness. Even to hold the ground those first pioneers gained is not a job for the timid or easygoing, now is it?"

Just as I was about to agree with this a fearful crashing sounded in the kitchen. It almost brought Halliday off his bench. "What was that?"

"Louis' wife is splitting her wood for the morning," I explained.

As I left Halliday for the night he told me that

he was glad we'd got to know each other right off. "I feel we ought to be good friends, Constable. Both in the Government service and its only representatives out here, I suppose."

"There's only Ed Patten the postmaster and he doesn't count. We'll get along all right."

Settling down for a session of blanket drill in my little barracks that night I felt puzzled about him. Had he been guying me in a quiet way with all that talk about the wild frontier or did he mean it? I had always rated myself as average for wits but I couldn't decide. Maybe, I thought, I was slipping and the idea discouraged me so that I went off to sleep.

He visited me next day, came especially to see the barracks, he said, so I showed him through both rooms. My chair and battered old table impressed him more than anything. "So this is where you sit and deal out impartial justice!" I couldn't deny it; I had to sit somewhere when I wrote up a case.

"It is certainly a striking tribute to you fellows," he went on. "No imposing courts or bailiffs are needed to support you. I've read a lot about the Mounted Police; you have to be ready to meet any emergency, don't you?"

"Just about," I said.

"And you always get your man! That magnificent tradition must be an inspiration to you, holding your solitary posts out here!"

I admitted that it helped some. But I swear it was no particular pleasure to hear him rant about

it. I'd heard enough of that stuff while I was training at the depot in Regina to last me the rest of my life. Those fire-eating old instructors spent about half their time preaching it to us. You'd have thought they believed every word of it if they hadn't spent the other half knocking our horns off to make us meek and humble. I didn't tell Halliday that of course but I wondered what other reason he imagined a man could have for being satisfied to stick in a hole like Athabasca Landing if not to escape such harping.

"I envy you really," he declared. "The position you occupy is the very foundation of all the progress that's being made for civilization out here. It rests on you entirely. What would all these other activities—the fur trade for example—do without you in a country full of aboriginals?"

I hadn't thought of that. Halliday went right on: "Gallant sentinels of order and justice; vanguards of empire confronting the perils of the raw frontier!"

"Is that out of a book?" I asked.

"It might be," he evaded.

I couldn't have stood any more just then and to my relief he had to go. Not that I was more modest naturally than I had to be but it made me nervous to hear him go on that way. I went up to the Company's post, hoping that I could get a harsh word or two from old Malcolm Fraser as an antidote.

"What like of a man is the new telegrapher?"

he demanded. "Would he be having the discretion that's needful in such a post?"

But I had a question to be answered first. "Malcolm, what are aboriginals?"

He peered at me over the top of his spectacles. "'Tis no time for levity this morning, or making riddles, Constable. Aboriginals are native or indigenous inhabitants. What of it?"

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing at all, only the country's full of them and I didn't know it."

"Ye wouldn't," Malcolm agreed. "I'll call on the lad myself."

Malcolm paid a long visit to the telegraph office next day and I met him on the path as he was leaving. "What do you think of him?" I asked.

Malcolm drew himself up stiffly though he was but a withered crackling of a man with not more than a pint of blood in him. It was one of the requirements of being his friend, to stand ready to quarrel with him instantly. He had come to be very ingenious about it and so had survived a lifetime of monotony in that country without quite losing his mind.

"Are ye aware, Mr. Lynch, that ye are naught but a type?"

"How's that?"

"I've had my eyes opened, Constable; ye are no the fair to average officer I thought, but a type."

"What about yourself?" I demanded.

"Aye, think of it!" he exclaimed. "Ye fail to realize the kind of a man ye're offerin' impudence to, no doubt. 'Tis a direct descendant, on the mercantile side, of the Governor and Company of Adventurers! Heir to two hundred and thirty-seven years of tradition and history, Constable. Adventurous colorful history, mind ye; part and parcel of the romantic story of fur! Did ye ever think of that, Mr. Lynch?"

"Never," I said.

"Ye wouldn't! But I'll no be harsh wi' ye; come away into the office a bit an'—'an' we'll fill the glass and lift it up an' drink to the voyageur.'"

"To who? But never mind; step out."

It was surprising to see Malcolm go so far in his horseplay, for inside the office he practically made good his offer. "You said 'fill the glass,'" I reminded him.

"'Twas but a figure of speech, Constable, and not to be held literally. Poetry and passion are all very well but yon whusky has precious age on it. Drink it down before I change my mind altogether."

Malcolm refused to commit himself when I asked his opinion of the new telegrapher. "We were all of us young on a time, Constable, though never so young as yon lad, to be sure." And that was as far as he would go.

It was all very well for Malcolm to make light of himself, for he could take his enthusiasms or leave them alone. But there were others in the Landing more impressionable. I passed Tim Wade's house on the way home and there was Tim at the door flagging me in. The little side-wheeler, *Northern Star*, belonged to Tim and as a usual thing he'd be found down at the river in winter-time, tinkering away on her.

"What's happened, Tim? Is the old *Dog Star* ready for the water again?"

"'At gallant little craft's ready for 'er season of trial," he answered solemnly. "She makes no bid

for beauty or th' lux'ry of deep water passage; she carries food 'at men may yet s'journ in mos' ill favored regions. Yessir!"

Now if my horse had stood up on his hind feet and sung "God save the King" some morning when I went out to feed him, it wouldn't have been more surprising than such a speech from Tim Wade. It simply wasn't in him. More than that, when he married he got a woman that took over the talking for both of them and Tim ran the boat and said "Sure," about three times a day if it was necessary. I looked him over as I went into the house; he was wearing a wide foolish smile and his face was redder than my tunic. His official mouth-piece spoke up as I came in the room; "Tim's been drinking," she explained in case I had not noticed. "I don't know whatever hit him to come home in the middle of the forenoon and start drinkin' and abusin' me. That's the way with a man though; go along steady as anything and then all at once start actin' hysterical. . . ."

"Dry up!" Tim commanded her. "Take another one, Lynch. Don't let her fool you, I been 'preciated, that's all. Yessir, m' callin' goes back to the golden days o' romance, Lynch. An' hist'ry! They's a poem about it if I could only remember it. Don' matter though, 's a great little feller!"

"Who is, Tim?"

"'At telegafer! Somepin' about him."

I was beginning to believe it. Tim followed me to the door as I left and hung onto the knob and

recited after me: "Bearin' th' sinews of 'nother year's subsistence 'n spite of rapid, rock or bar; battlin' the rush of floods to bring my lady's . . ."

I missed the rest of it. It was plain though, that Halliday had been planting the germs of romance in everyone he had seen. That thrilling stuff was all right to spread on the outside in order to make people envious of the life we led, but for local application it was dangerous. Tim Wade was going to find it so. No poem would be epic enough to stop that woman of his for very long. Halliday might possibly have been justified in glorifying the Mounted Police a little; they wore uniforms to make them look the part. But Tim Wade and his old side-wheeled tub! Halliday should have used discrimination in his warbling.

Nor was this all. On the way to my barracks I heard a shout and someone was running to overtake me. It was Louis Papineau and even he was showing every sign of being agitated.

"What's the matter, Louis?" I inquired.

"I gonna tell you somet'ing, M'sieur Lynch," he panted. "Dis makin' de foolish, she's no good for me. You t'ink a'm habitat ordinaire an' 'fraid for raise de hell, I guess?"

"You'd better be," I told him though it was all news to me.

"Na, sir!" he thumped his chest. "I don't! By Chris', my papa she's go back to dat ol' tam voyageur. You gonna look out, M'sieur Lynch, you mak me mad one tam and—cl'k!" Louis scowled

at me and drew a hand across his throat. "You don' forget, M'sieur Lynch, 'De Blackfoot maid remember too, dat ol' tam voyageur!" "

I'd heard enough; Halliday had been talking to him. So I took Louis' nose firmly between my thumb and finger and drew him to me. "I don't doubt a word of it," I said, "but you're all mixed up about me. You think I'm just a Mountie, don't you? Well, I'm a sentinel of order and justice," I quoted, "doing something or other to a crude frontier. Don't let me hear any more rawmeat talk from you, Louis. Form two-deep!" Then I stepped on his foot and shoved him backward into the snow.

This was too much; if Mr. Halliday kept on at that rate he would soon be turning that peaceable little village into the hazardous outpost he imagined it to be. It looked as though I would have to curb him tactfully but firmly until the paint wore off his enthusiasm for these rugged types.

Seeing the wreckage he had made of some of the leading citizens, I fully expected to find him tight when I went over to his office in the afternoon. He was intoxicated all right but it was over an old map he had found in the place.

"Look at this!" he exclaimed before I had time to begin on him. "I have just been locating this place on the map."

"I didn't know it was shown," I said.

"Of course it is; this is the most strategic situation in the north. It fascinates me! Look how

the rivers of this region gather into the floor of the basin. Here's the Athabasca; it picks up the Pembina and these others and then the Lesser Slave. From this point it swings north to Lake Athabasca. And here's the Peace coming in from away to the west and south. Is it as big as the Athabasca, I wonder?"

"Bigger," I told him.

"They make the Great Slave and it becomes the MacKenzie. One could start from here in a boat and go clear to the Arctic, couldn't he?"

"The water all goes down there," I admitted.

"Think of that! Isn't it immense to realize that this place we are in is the very gateway of all the vast regions beyond? And who knows what stores of wealth it still contains?"

"It's mostly scrub and mosquitoes and water and mud in summertime," I replied. "In the winter it's scrub and snow. There's the fur of course."

"Ah, the fur," he breathed. "The story of Empire is told in that word! And this quaint village is the neck of the bottle through which it passes. No wonder it is so picturesque, this capital of a world apart!"

I doubted if there was any hope for him. And I couldn't help liking the chump; his light blue eyes would glow and film over with emotion when he talked of the country in that earnest hopeful way. There was no doubt that he really felt it and I was embarrassed somewhat that I couldn't

see it that way too. But it was no use; I had been in the place two years, you see.

Now if one stood at the river and faced south, there was the trail to Edmonton, running straight for a little way and disappearing into the forest of spruce that hemmed the settlement in to the river. This road, no more than the twin paths of a sled track, was the principal and only street. On it the straggle of buildings that made up Athabasca Landing fronted. Some crowded forward as if fearful lest something be hidden from them, and others had a modest porch or stoop invitingly before their doors. And yet others retired indifferently, or faced the river or the forest as though pretending to ignore the traffic on the road. But from knowing the occupants of these I understood that this had been prompted by greater instead of lesser curiosity; even the rear rooms of these had windows through which an eye might privately be kept on things and goings and comings be observed.

The only feature held in common by these buildings was their log construction. Some had the bark peeled from their logs, some were hewed smooth on the inside and some outside as well, and some were neither or none of these but simple log affairs wearing their crisp curls of bark inside and out. Unique, Halliday had said, and maybe it did look that way to him. Certainly no stranger would have required more than its description to find any building in the place. And that without inquiring

among the half hundred or so of permanent white inhabitants. If the Company's post was bigger, that of the French outfit had more hitching-racks in front. These rivals competed for the fur of the country in scores of places while the two great churches maneuvered for the Indians' souls. In Athabasca Landing their missions faced each other on common ground apart from the road a way. But the trading posts were not so frankly opposed, so that they seemed to be forever glaring past each other from the two sides of the road.

Tim Wade's house had the most windows unless one counted the combined residence and trading post of Captain Duncan. This was upriver a quarter mile or more and could not properly be reckoned as part of the town. Louis Papineau's hotel stood nearest the river and it was one log wide and two logs long with a lean-to shed behind it made of boards whipsawed from green spruce. Sun and rain had shrunk these boards apart and curled their edges outward so that Louis had been obliged to cover the cracks with bits of the packing cases in which his food supplies arrived.

The result was a strange display of trade-marks, labels and devices common to a country where food was the matter of first consideration. There was a dead lion, I remember, standing on his head with a cluster of bees hovering about his middle. This was a curious thing enough to the Indian children who stopped to gape at it, but no resident or traveler from the country beyond found it strange

in any sense; they knew that Lyle's syrup was being advertised. The jams of Cross & Blackwell were likewise there along with somebody's premium bacon and the Blue-nose butter that comes in cans like axle-grease. One box-end blazoned forth in blue-black print the legend 50-60 which was then reckoned to be a decent size in eating prunes. To the initiate there were no mysteries of any sort proclaimed upon that wall nor anything to inspire fancy unless it should be in a hungry man, in which case it offered some estimate of the prospective diet of the place. Indeed the wall came to be known in time as Louis' Bill-of-Fare.

That was Athabasca Landing as one saw it facing south. A scattering of squat log buildings with stove-pipe chimneys; trading posts and warehouses painted, or maybe it was whitewash, on the outside; stables with pole corrals attached; a wall of green timber beyond, poplar and willow scrub everywhere else. It was the same looking north save for the river and its towering opposite bank that rose two hundred feet above the water. That was all of it, barring the Indian villages along the creeks above and below town and an odd few cabins across the river. And there was of course Madam Gerard's place hidden in the timber above town; but few ever noticed the cabin and it needn't be counted. That was Halliday's 'capital of a world apart'!

"Names had a meaning in those days, hadn't they?" Halliday mused. "Hear these from the

map; Fort Chippewayan, MacMurray, Fort Smith . . . here's Fort Resolution! Isn't the name a tribute to some hardy old explorer faring north? One couldn't imagine them using commonplace names for those old posts."

"Well, Smith's a very common name," I said.

Halliday didn't appear to hear me. "Along the Peace are some curious ones"; he went on, "Fort Vermilion, Dunvegan, Fort St. John and then Hudson's Hope! Do you get the significance of that name, Mr. Lynch?"

"You tell me," I begged.

"I imagine it belongs to the story of Hudson the navigator, for whom the Bay is named. He discovered the Bay while looking for a northern passage to China, you remember."

I didn't but I kept still about it.

"Long afterward some other explorer, probably MacKenzie, followed up the Peace in search of a route to the Pacific and came to these Chutes, the most westerly point a boat of any sort might reach. No doubt he named it Hudson's Hope in honor of the courageous efforts Hudson made to find his way around the continent. It's a monument to his dreams!"

"It's a darn poor one then," I said for I had been to Hudson's Hope.

Halliday was undisturbed; he remained as thrilled at finding those spots on the map and piecing together the stories he had read of them as most people would who have been digging up buried treas-

ure. A pale, colorless little fellow all bug-eyed with romance and history and the thought of being right in the middle of it. As if he believed that something momentous might happen to him because of it.

He folded the ragged map carefully and put it away in his desk. "Do you know," he said, "I like this vast country immensely!"

"Honest? You wouldn't say it just to please the rest of us?"

"No, I like it. It satisfies something in me. I feel that I belong out here with the rest of you and I have dreamed of getting an appointment to such a place ever since I entered the School of Telegraphy in Ottawa. None of my people could understand it but I know I'll have a chance to find myself and really come to know my qualities in such a place."

"There's been quite an epidemic of that going on, just lately," I remarked. "Some of them are getting a biased opinion in favor of themselves."

"I am eager for the thing that life and experience can teach me; to separate the gold from the—the—"

"The quartz?" I suggested.

"From the dross," he corrected. "I look on this as a most fortunate opportunity, Constable; I am still young and already out here taking my place in this stimulating vital life among such a people. Freed of the narrow restraints of cities and petty little towns, with an untried frontier against which

to test my mettle! Is it any wonder that I find it so inspiring, Mr. Lynch?"

"No," I said, "if you look at it that way it isn't."

I felt certain he was overestimating the importance of a little geography but it was a subject that could not be argued. He would be bound to think I was obstinate or stupid if I tried to change his opinion about it just as Brandy Shannon had done when I first met him. Brandy was a kind of lieutenant and man-Friday to Captain Duncan and his independent trading post above the Landing. He was on the stage with me when I came out from Edmonton to take over the detachment. Inside the first ten minutes he had learned my name and begun making plans on the great friends we'd be.

"'Tis the Irish must stick together," he declared. "There's Lynches back in Waterford, now I think of it; I've kin among them too. We might be two cousins easy as not. I noticed a resimblance the minute I saw the face ye have."

It wasn't so noticeable to me but I let it pass.

"You stick by me," he went on, "an' we'll show thim somethin' about steppin' on the Irish. Ye look a hefty lad, Sergeant, but I doubt ye'd be nimble on yer two feet. Tell me, are ye nimble, Captain?"

"Fairly," I said.

"I knew ye would be," he assured me. "Nimble and wit' good bones in yer hand. Between us we could lick a dozen men at wance, bein' Irish the way we are."

Now my father had been a Belfast man before he came to Nova Scotia but I never thought of wearing my pipe upside down because of it. I listened and that was all that Brandy required. At the noon stop he motioned me to come with him into the scrub along the trail and he finally stopped beside a little sprawl of lake or slough like a million others scattered over the north country.

"Spit in the water," he ordered mysteriously. I had no idea what kind of a heathen rite he was celebrating but I obliged him.

"Do ye know what it is ye have done, Sergeant? That little gob 'twill be divided most like and each part of it go intil a siperate ocean. I bin a sailor an' I've spit in all of thim first and last, but only here can a man replinish two of thim at once. Don't ye feel grand somehow at the thought av it?"

I knew it was quite possible for that insignificant bit of swamp to drain off both ways, to the Athabasca and Saskatchewan. In that case of course, its waters would come in time to the Arctic and Hudson's Bay. "Not so very grand," I said. "Besides I know of a better place than this if you're looking for a thrilling spot. There's a glacier hung between some mountain peaks away beyond the Yellowhead, and if you could cross the top of it and find the exact spot, you could replenish the Pacific Ocean as well as these other two. The Columbia river heads on the other side of it."

"I am disgusted wit' ye," he declared. "Yes, and all yer treachery; holdin' yerself for a serious man

when ye can't see beyant the nose on yer face. I doubt yer bein' Irish at all! An' I'll say good day to ye, Constable Lynch!"

He refused to speak to me again till we had almost reached the Landing, then he leaned over and said: "I was only jokin', understand."

"That's fine," I told him.

"I mane yisterday whin I said there was Lynches in Waterford. There's none of the name there at all. An' they'd be no kin of mine if the place was runnin' wit' 'em. I wouldn't own 'em!"

That was the way Brandy's mind worked and I could see that Halliday was going to find a real affinity in him. Fortunately the other inspired and heroic souls around the Landing began to behave normally within a few days. Old Malcolm Fraser answered with a morose grunt when I inquired after the state of his traditions and Louis Papineau resumed his customary smirk for me. When I went down to the river to make an observation on Tim Wade I heard enough to satisfy me that he had backslid, too. The Northern Star was no gallant little craft just then in Tim's opinion but a something-or-other old wood-burning scow. And how in hell many more repairs was he going to have to make before she would be able to stagger through another summer? These remarks were made to himself from inside her firebox and punctuated by the banging of a hammer on her boiler-plate. I took his word for it and tiptoed away; about the only thing left to keep my curi-

osity from dying a natural death was watching the results of Halliday's testing his mettle against the untried frontier. And there was of course the Duncan; I could always fill in the time with official concern over him. If there was anyone in the Landing then who gave indications of being the historical character Halliday was seeking, it was the old Captain. Only it was Police history he threatened to make; his personal exploits he kept hidden as carefully as possible. But my interest had been repeatedly stimulated. In my barracks was a collection of very sharp advices from Headquarters and all referring to the same thing. Somebody was consistently beating the game by running liquor in small quantities to the Lesser Slave Lake country above us on the river.

Discretion had marked the deal from first to last; there had been no hurried dumping of a few cases among the Indians, resulting in a protracted general spree. But once or twice each winter, usually toward the spring, there would be abundant evidence in the district that old John Firewater was flowing carefully around and entirely too many Indians would be wearing happy, amiable grins. They are not supposed to look that way.

Naturally harsh words were passed out to the various Police detachments declaring that due diligence was not being exercised in the various districts involved. It was also intimated freely that unless "means were discovered for procuring the evidence necessary to the conviction of the vio-

lators of this act" that a general hell-raising would ensue. And naturally also, the detachment at Grouard on the west end of Slave Lake would defend themselves by complaining, "Why doesn't Lynch stop it at the Landing? If he doesn't want the credit for stopping it why doesn't he apply for a transfer and let someone else have a chance to earn stripes?" There was more of the same, even going so far at times as to insist that I must be in on the deal. That was just a sample of the average fat-headed Policeman trying to think and I made allowances accordingly, but between them and the pressure applied from above, this particular puzzle was getting to be a sore subject with me.

And of course I had long since pinned the matter on this same Captain Duncan. I established his guilt to my own satisfaction by eliminating everyone else in the whole district. Nobody else was mixed up in it and still it was being done. Unfortunately my conclusions wouldn't stand as evidence or I would have had the man cooped long before. The trouble was that the old scoundrel failed to react to all the bait that was laid to catch him; I could detect until I was red in the face and the net result was nothing.

From the burden of disgust I labored under it was a relief to see the brisk way young Halliday started his life among us. He explained to me that the whole atmosphere of his place was unsuited to the dignity of a Government office. When next I

stopped in I noticed he was wearing sleeve-guards and a visor over his eyes. Louis Papineau was there hammering and sawing away and there was a fine guard-rail built across the room with a gate that gave entrance to the private enclosure sacred to the telegraph instrument. I congratulated him on the businesslike appearance of the place.

"I can't understand how my predecessor got on with such a casual arrangement," he said. "Without regard to the volume of business that may be handled, there are certain things to be observed in running an office of this kind. I shouldn't care to have the sole responsibility without an enclosure of some sort around me. It's my only protection."

"It's not much protection at that, is it? A nimble thief could climb right over it and get to your cash box."

"Oh, I didn't have it put up to guard the little money I keep in here, Constable. It's to protect something more valuable than that."

"What?" I wondered.

"The tradition of secrecy that surrounds this calling. I supposed you understood that. We fellows have rigid instructions on that point. Paragraph 34 of our regulations says: 'A telegram is a closed communication and no operator or other employee shall repeat, reveal or expose, in whole or in part the substance or contents of any message intrusted to his custody. Nor shall he by reference or allusion indicate the nature of any such message to any unauthorized person or persons.'

That is one rule no telegrapher is allowed to forget."

I said I'd bet that the old man who was there before him had never even heard of it.

"Well, there you are," he submitted. "That may have something to do with the fact that he's not here any more. I understand he is out of the service entirely."

The old operator was out all right but not for any infraction of paragraph 34. He had simply come to me, saying he was damned and other things, if he was going to rot in that hole any longer. He was a young man yet, only sixty-eight in fact, and he didn't propose to be sleeping his brains and ambition away handling an average of six telegrams a week. God knew he was lazy but not that lazy! And here was the office key. If I could operate a little as I always pretended, why, tell Edmonton that he was on the way. I wanted to refuse the key but it was either take it or let the old wretch throw it away in the snow. I succeeded in informing Edmonton that the post was now vacant and let it go at that. I did read myself bleary-eyed over stacks of office copies of all the telegraph business that had been done in the past few years, looking for anything that might serve as a tip on old Duncan's activities. But the nearest I got to it was a telegram from Victoria signed Isabella and thanking the old boy profusely for the gift of a coat. It might have been the makings of a scandal but I couldn't find where he had

answered it nor think of any use I might make of the information.

Halliday was deploring the condition in which he found the office files. The previous operator had reduced the labor of keeping his records to a bare minimum; he had allowed the copies of telegrams to accumulate on his desk until they actually got in his way and then, with a sweep of his hand, they were all filed at once in a stout open box that sat under the end of his table. Halliday had been hours, he said, trying to arrange them chronologically. But it was useless, some of them were dated only with words like "today" or "this A.M." or "last night" sprawled across the tops. I could sympathize with him knowing that my own pawing in that box had not improved the arrangement.

"That's almost criminal carelessness," he declared. "I'm not certain but I should report the condition I found here. Why, suppose some unauthorized person had come in when the man was busy; he could have read any number of them, lying exposed as they were! People are always intensely curious about telegrams, you know."

"If anyone tries to read one of yours let me know and I'll sentence him to read that whole batch. That would cure him."

"I am not so certain of that," he objected. "I don't know how it will be here but I have not worked at any place before where someone was not trying to gain an advantage through the telegrapher."

That was probably no exaggeration either, seeing this was his first job.

"They don't understand the significance of an operator's position. The office is a sacred trust, actually, and if I expose so much as a word of any message that goes through here, I am unfaithful to that trust. The public doesn't seem to understand that, probably because they know a telegrapher is obliged to be aware of the contents of the messages he handles. Fortunately the code is a secret or one couldn't protect his patrons."

I had been tempted to interrupt this and tell him the sounder was clamoring for AL, his station call, but he heard it just then and wheeled around to answer. And before I quite realized it, the instrument was revealing its secret code to me. The name got past before I caught it, but I heard the rest. It was out of Winnipeg on the day before and said: "I tired living alone Axel I going United States with another man and taken the baby goodbye Axel. Signed Christina."

Halliday turned to me when he was done. "Where would I find a Mr. Olsen, Constable? Axel Olsen?"

"Axel Olsen?" I repeated. "Why, that must be Ole Axhandlesen; Tim Wade's engineer. I wondered if he had any other name! His is the little cabin just beyond the Anglican mission."

Halliday made preparation to close the office and deliver his message at once, a thing his predecessor would have scorned to do. I hurried across to my

barracks and wrote down the message while I remembered it. I had use for such information for in all probability Axel would make some kind of a reaction to the news; develop a spectacular jag at the very least. It was tough on him, I thought, to be getting a piece of news like that bashed over his head though it had been poor brains on his part to leave his woman alone so long with competition as keen as it was in all that western country. Axel's poker playing wasn't really more than half as clever as he thought and that was his real reason for building a cabin and wintering at the Landing instead of going home as usual. I doubt if he won enough from the freight teamsters to pay more than his expenses and now his woman had jumped the border with another man. Even Axel would see a loss in that.

And promptly enough, the second morning after, Tim Wade came to the barracks hunting his engineer, saying he had agreed to help with some work on the boat that day. He had knocked on the door but had no answer so I went up with him and we tried again. Finally I kicked the thing in.

Axel had reacted all right, as I saw when I pulled away the blankets he had hung over the windows. He was lying in his bunk all nice and straight with a bullet-hole through head.

Tim Wade said: "Good gosh!" and so many other things that I had to shoo him out. It looked like a murder at first glance and that was all Tim was entitled to at the time. Of course a row might

have started over a card game and somebody taken a shot at Axel. But that would have been a very unlikely thing to have happened, even out there, I thought, and anyhow the place had been locked from inside. Then I noticed his pillow had a hole in it too, and when I lifted a corner of it there was Axel's revolver underneath. I broke it open and found an empty cartridge and powdermarks inside the barrel. That made it Axel's own affair.

I searched through his one-roomed cabin and found his money and a lot of papers that included a life-insurance policy. But there was no sign anywhere of the telegram. While Tim Wade was gone spreading the news I read over the insurance carefully and found that it had a clause voiding the company's liability if the insured committed suicide. Tim was back by then and most of the population with him, but before I let them in I had another good look around. From the position of Axel's hands it could easily have been an accident; everybody knew that he owned the hog-leg lying there under his pillow, in spite of the fact that he had no more use for it than he had for a crutch. He might easily have been in the habit of sleeping with it there; God knows there are plenty of men nutty enough for that. I felt of the pillow, a skimpy affair with not more than a hatful of goose-hair in it. One guess was as good as another; it might have been an accident.

So I had four or five leading citizens, including Tim Wade, come in and look over the results, tell-

ing them I would require a statement later. Halliday was not in the crowd gathered outside but he had heard of it when I went to his office. I wrote a wire to headquarters in Edmonton giving the details of the affair and referring them to some fraternal society of which Axel appeared to be a member. I added that the evidence pointed to accidental death. Halliday seemed openly interested in my conclusions concerning the cause of it. "So you really think it was an accident," he asked.

"It looks that way. No indication of anyone else having done it."

"Oh, I wasn't suggesting that," he said.

"Then just what are you suggesting?" I asked him. "There are only two ways of a man getting the top of his head shot off; by himself or somebody else."

"Exactly!"

"Well?" I encouraged him.

"But would it necessarily be an accident if he did it himself?"

"I see," I replied. "Have you got a reason for thinking that Axel stepped himself off purposely?"

"I'm not at liberty to say what I think or why."

He was a little self-conscious and flustered in answering but he was meaning to be very firm about it. I knew what bothered him, his awful responsibility as a telegrapher and the message he had delivered to Axel. This was a fortunate opportunity for him to show that he could meet the require-

ments of his stern calling; the contents of that message and the effect it had on Axel's conduct were secrets buried forever in his keeping! Just what was he really made of underneath the portentous words he had on so many subjects? I took the notion to render him out and see.

"If it's liberty you haven't got, I can give you some," I said.

"How?"

"I can march you right up there and have you view the ruins and when I have done that I can call you as a witness and find out exactly what you mean."

He wilted visibly at the prospect of looking on a Swede that was unpleasantly dead.

"No, no," he exclaimed. I was only . . . I really meant nothing, I just spoke unofficially. I couldn't bear to . . . Is he . . . disfigured shockingly?"

"Well, I wouldn't have called him beautiful before, even for a Swede, and his appearance hasn't been improved. We all knew him so we had no trouble recognizing him. You might not, but that needn't make any difference to your value as a witness if you think I'm guessing wrong."

"I don't, Constable, not really! You'd know of course. I . . . it was only an idle question in the first place."

"Then let me make a few unofficial remarks," I said. "This Ole Axhandlesen has nothing but friends around here. He was as fine and square a

Swede as ever chewed condition powders. Don't go talking idly to anybody else, see? Just let it all ride."

"I won't mention it to anybody, Constable," he promised and it didn't require any second sight to know that he meant it. I felt a little sorry for him, standing there so uncomfortable and exposed as being a little squeamish and timid in spite of the tall hunger for adventure he'd been expressing.

So I held an inquest of sorts and the witnesses all agreed from their previous knowledge of the deceased and their examination of the scene that it was unquestionably an accident. Tim Wade went so far as to declare that since Axel had agreed to run his engine the next summer it was sufficient proof. He was too square to have shot himself while under contract. For my own part it looked certain that Axel had meant for us to think it was accidental, so I gave him the benefit of the doubt and entered it as such in my report.

And he was grateful for it, I imagined; he showed it by staying frozen tight and solid in my back room where I stood him to wait till his Lodge brothers could come and get him. Axel had lots of callers during that time but Halliday wouldn't come near the place.

III

It was said of that country that it had only three seasons: July, August and winter. That is not true of course but the winters did seem infernally long to most people. You got so used to the cold and snow that you thought of it as having always been winter, and you barely remembered what the summer before was like. That came from there being no weather, only climate, there. I mean no storms occurred to emphasize the change of seasons. And then all at once if you didn't look sharp, winter had gone before you were aware of it.

This was invariably the case among the freighters who hauled stuff from Edmonton to the Landing. They'd plug along all winter on their contracts with the big trading companies, not hurrying, even willing to lose a day now and then when the snow was good and the going easy. But let bare spots begin to show in the ruts of the sled-runners or the snow get soft and start balling up in their horses' hoofs and they'd begin a frantic scramble to beat the coming spring. Where ordinarily there'd be two or three dozen teams in the Landing over night, the number would jump to three times that at the very last. Some drove by night to take advantage of the frost in the bare spots and the lines waiting to unload at the compa-

nies' warehouses would be fuming and using language over the delay.

It was from such signs that I was warned of the following spring being at hand. I heard a teamster complaining loudly to the manager of the French concern about the loss of his time in waiting. He had three more loads to bring, it seemed, and the snow was getting thin on the south end. I looked around me then and while everything appeared much the same, certain changes were evident. The snow was soft and moist for one thing and had shrunk into itself like an old garment. Threadbare spots appeared unexpectedly around the base of trees and on the warm side of the buildings. And a more certain evidence of spring was the number of Indian dogs prowling about on the lookout for an unprotected load of freight that might be raided. That meant the Indians were coming in from their winter trap-lines to the villages on either side of the Landing. I decided to give my old horse a little exercise and pay a visit to some of my friends among them.

From the foot of the street a road ran west upriver to the Captain's post and on a creek beyond him was one of the principle Indian settlements. I turned up this road and overtook young Halliday with his telegraph receipt book under his arm. We hadn't seen much of each other lately.

"I could save you a trip," I said, "if you've a message for the Captain. I'm going past there."

But no, he needed the walk anyway and was glad

to have the excuse, thanks just the same. He was still a little diffident toward me, afraid I was laughing at him, I guess. I wasn't and I didn't want him to think so for I liked him somehow, in spite of his making-believe. I got off my horse and walked with him as far as Duncan's just to reassure him of my friendliness. I succeeded too, for he showed he was himself again by holding forth on the subject of Brandy Shannon. Halliday thought him the most unique character he'd ever met; a typical soldier of fortune that would naturally seek out such a place as Athabasca Landing.

"He didn't though," I corrected, "the story is that he came to Edmonton with Captain Duncan, walking behind him and carrying his bags after the fashion of the Orient."

"What I mean is, he seems to belong just here."

"He does," I agreed. "The Captain owns him, soul, body and breeches. He'll stay while the Captain stays and go when the Captain goes."

"Oh, is Captain Duncan planning to leave?" asked Halliday.

"I doubt it," I said. "In fact, I think he plans to stay a long time. What do you think of him?"

"I've only met him," Halliday answered, "but I was very much struck by the glimpse I had. I imagine he'd be very interesting to know."

"He interests me," I said. "And I hardly know him myself."

"I'm surely going to get better acquainted with him," Halliday declared.

"You won't find it easy, I'm thinking. In the six or eight years he's been here he hasn't made an intimate of anyone. There are weeks when nobody sees him, unless it's when he's tramping back and forth on that narrow porch behind the house. Brandy Shannon calls it the bridge. Some of the local people called on him when he first came here but he discouraged them. He's a pretty dour old Scottie from most accounts. Be careful he doesn't bite you."

Halliday smiled at the suggestion. "He'll be willing enough to see me."

He was so confident of it that I glanced at him and something in his expression was familiar. It was the least bit mysterious and secretly pleased. Then I recognized it; the same suggestion of holding confidential information that he had over Axel Olsen's telegram. The telegrapher's sacred trust. I wanted to laugh at him. Kid-like, he wasn't content with knowing something; he had to let me see he knew it. Probably he was only acting his favorite part and trying to induce me to question him. Then he would choke me off and get even for the bluff I had run on him before. It was a temptation to try him out just to see if I was right.

But I had a much better hunch just then. I remembered that my principal business was being a Mounted Policeman with something more to be thinking of than pulling this youngster's tail to see what he would do. Anybody that had even a chance of getting chummy with the Captain Dun-

can was a person for me to cultivate most carefully. Recalling this in connection with Halliday, I had the notion that he might prove useful to me some day or other. It was possible that he'd get into the old boy's confidence with all his fresh young ignorance, where his betters would be chased away. If he did, I felt certain I could pump him out to my own advantage.

"You might be the very man to get acquainted with him," I said. "This old Captain is nobody's fool and neither are you. I wish you luck."

I stopped to talk with some of the old Indians in the village, and kept an eye out for a certain woman I wanted to have a word with. I might have gone to the door of her cabin and knocked, in which case I knew she wouldn't answer. So I waited until her curiosity forced her to appear and then I rode over there.

"Is Tommy Thomas home yet, Annie?" I asked. She shrugged as if the whereabouts of her husband was of least concern to her. I knew also that this was true. Annie was a strapping young sister, about half-breed I imagined and handsome in a coppery, Indian way.

"Speak up, Annie," I said. "Has Tommy got home yet?"

"He come back today," she admitted.

"I want to see him then; where is he?"

She moved her eyes slightly in the direction of Duncan's post. "Over there."

"Tell him to come to see me tonight, eh, Annie?"

I waited for her answer and it came finally. "I tell 'un," she promised and I rode on.

I had an arrangement with the half-breed Tommy Thomas. His chief occupation was raising pups to sell along the river. This could not ordinarily be regarded as the means of a livelihood in a country already overrun with dogs. But there are dogs and dogs. Tommy Thomas specialized in pups of such an astonishing size and quality that in time these became accepted as the equal at fighting or work of two average mongrel huskies. Tommy encouraged this reputation and boosted the price of his wares accordingly, till ownership of dogs of this particular strain became a vogue among the Indians. And until I discovered it by accident, Tommy had kept the paternity of this succession of splendid pups a dark mystery.

The loss of his graft meant going to work for Tommy, joining the crews of the river scows in spring, even plodding the tiresome length of a trap-line along some desolate creek in the bitter cold of winter. Real hardships these, to Tommy whose notion of a life career was to sit watching a litter of pups grow up to doghood. Moreover, there was Annie. Annie had gone to the mission school and had some ideas of her own. She was as good as anybody, the Padre had said so many times, and she had no mind to be wasting her life in some remote trapper's cabin on a diet of bannock and moose with maybe muskrat and rabbit for variety. Not Annie! She liked to wear thin

red stockings in summertime and shoes instead of mocassins. Mosquitoes bit her worse but there was compensation when she hitched herself elegantly over puddles of water along the one street of the Landing. There were lots of things that Annie liked and meant to have; if Tommy Thomas could not furnish them without trapping or running scows—then so much the worse for him.

It was no effort therefore for Tommy to learn to love the Police and all their works, when he knew that I shared his kennel secrets. So our arrangement came about. I found a way for him to gain the confidence of Captain Duncan, or Brandy Shannon rather, and he became a sort of confidential messenger for them and regularly I had him in and pumped him dry of everything he knew of their activities. Just now he'd returned from a long trip somewhere beyond the Peace and I was wanting to know if it meant anything for me and my ambition to outguess the old Captain and snare him in a liquor deal.

"How goes, Tommy?" I said when he appeared that night.

"She's no good," Tommy declared. "Look at my pants—see 'un?"

I saw. The rear of his trousers showed unmistakable distress. They had been crudely reinforced with a piece of blanket.

"Begin at the beginning," I said, "and tell me all about it. No wild-eyed lies or guess-so business, now. Where have you been and why?"

Well, then, did I know the young man they called Wallis that came through the Landing every spring and was chief boss and king for a lot of Beavers away to the Hay Lakes? Sure, but it was nearer the Liard that he had found them. The Captain Duncan sent him. Damn funny business sure. Look at his pants! He went out to find those Beavers and maybe dig a little hole in Wallis' business for the Captain; drop a word that nice marten skins or silver fox didn't need to be wasted paying Wallis for grubstakes. Did I understand? Well, he found a friend among them, a man Scarbelly, who hunted the bear together along the Porcupine one spring. Good friends with Scarbelly and stayed four days in the cabin with him, making brags about the fine woman Scarbelly had and all the nice kids and the grub to eat. Two of them Scarbelly's kids were white, sure. Did I think Tommy was a fool?

"Go on," I said. "What happened?"

Nothing was going to happen any more. Not to him. He'd got on fine with Scarbelly and his woman and all Scarbelly's friends. Them damn Beavers! Jump on a man and twist a stick into his pants and make him walk wherever they wanted. Into the river maybe. How was he going to help himself?

"Did Wallis do that?" I asked.

He never saw Wallis, but that Malotte was number two man and no damn good, sure. It was him that took charge and threatened to cut off

Tommy's ears if he ever showed up there again. Or take off his clothes and start him for home without them, maybe. But it wouldn't be Tommy Thomas next time, you bet your life. When the seat of his pants tore out he came home, that's all. He had lost his rifle and his pack and did I think the P'liss would go and get that Malotte and maybe hang him? Tommy wasn't sure, but it felt like frostbite back there. Look at his pants.

"Did the Captain Duncan tell you to offer the Beavers whisky for their best furs?" I asked him.

Well, not exactly, Tommy evaded. He only told Scarbelly it was easy to get around the Landing, that's all.

"Did the Captain say tell them that?"

"Brandy Shannon, he say so. I think I gotta fix him sometime, you watch. That Annie—"

"Did you take any whisky with you?" I demanded.

"No."

"How much?"

"Well, maybe I find one little bottle in my pack after I'm go. But I drinkin' up quick, Mr. Lynch. I don't givin' any to that Scarbelly, sure."

"What did the Captain say when you got back?"

"Nothing!" Tommy explained. "He say, 'Well?' then I go tellin' ever'thing. Before I'm done that little feller he come with yellow paper in his book."

That would be Halliday and his telegram, I reckoned.

“Then what?”

“The Captain look that yellow paper then grab his whiskers, that’s all. Brandy Shannon chase me out. What I’m goin’ do ’bout my rifle, Mr. Lynch? An’ my pants, huh?”

I didn’t know. I told him to make the Captain replace his loss but he seemed dubious about getting any satisfaction from that quarter.

There was no special nourishment for me in Tommy’s report so I sent him along home with instructions to keep his eyes open. It looked as if the spring break-up might come before I received another acid report from Headquarters about liquor getting past the Landing. Freight teams were pouring in with their last loads for the warehouses, and I stepped around pretty briskly, noting where all the merchandise went. Strangers were beginning to arrive on every stage too, Scandinavians for the most part, sent up to build the fleet of scows that went down to the north each spring. Most of them brought something to drink with them and Louis Papineau’s hotel was a noisy place at times.

I had all this to keep an eye on and Tommy Thomas came to report a general house-cleaning going on out at Duncan’s post. Brandy Shannon was refitting part of the living quarters, it seemed, with Annie and two other women engaged to clean and wash everything in sight. I rode out to have a look myself and bought some tobacco I didn’t need by way of an excuse.

"Looks like you were overhauling the place," I remarked to Brandy Shannon.

"Does it now? Sure you was always a queer man, Constable, wit' yer sispicions stickin' out in all directions. What makes it look like an overhaulin', I wonder?"

It was like Brandy to dispute the slightest point with me and there really was no sign of anything being done in the trade-room.

"I smell fresh paint," I said.

"'Tis not strange at all," he declared, "the way you do be daubin' it wit' yer hand."

I realized then that in leaning against the counter I had touched a small mirror lying on it and the frame had been freshly painted.

"Why did you put the fool thing just there?" I demanded.

"I did be cuffin' the Injun childer off it all mornin' and they tryin' to make pitchers on it wit' their fingers. But fur a grown man to come smearin' it is too much. Too damn much entirely, Mr. Lynch! We're grateful an' all fer yer custom though it's not tobaccy ye wanted av coorse. Now I'll trouble ye to let the sunshine be dryin' me lookin' glass the way it'll be ready whin the—"

"When the what?" I prompted him.

"Whin I want it," he amended. "An' I'll say good day to ye, Constable!"

I wasn't more than ordinarily curious anyway and I thought no more of it till the next afternoon. Passing the telegraph office I saw Halliday concen-

trating over his key so I stepped inside on the chance of getting an earful. He was receiving a message at the moment and I caught the last words: ". . . stage tomorrow morning, signed Isabella."

That meant nothing to me, having missed the first part, but the operator in Edmonton began chattering on his own account.

"And omygod I saw her," he clicked out. "Looks like Paris France—if don't make you howl like wolf you dead that's all—going out buy myself red necktie—"

To my disgust Halliday closed him off then and I had barely time to arrange an innocent expression on my face when he turned around.

"The swine!" he broke out.

"Who?" I demanded.

"Not you," he explained, "that vulgar ass in the Edmonton office."

"What's he done?"

"I can't tell you the circumstances just now, but you'll see in time what I mean."

There was no reason for disputing it so I drifted on and other matters intervened to prevent my watching where Halliday had delivered the message as I had meant to do.

I was talking to Malcolm Fraser on the evening the next stage was due, when Halliday came into the post. His receipt book was under his arm as usual but that was the only normal thing about him. He was dressed in the correct fashion for life in the glowing out-of-doors; fur cap, brilliant

mackinaw and the beaded mocassins and socks he wore when he first arrived. But in place of the mackinaw stags he had on riding breeches, fine cords with buck strappings inside the knee.

Malcolm peered anxiously at him. "What would it be, lad, if you've no telegram for me? Don't tell me you think to be courtin' amang the Indian lasses! Gaudy breeks and you shaved again, when God knows 'tis only Tuesday? Out with it now, if there's aught distressin' you. I'm an old man and I'll share my wisdom wi' ye gladly."

Halliday blushed and said nothing was wrong and made a bluff at buying some trifle or other to divert old Malcolm. I heard a sleighbell jingling outside, a team coming at the trot. Halliday hurried out at the sound of it.

"All the appearance of love!" Malcolm sighed. "What'll it be, Constable? You should know if you've any mind to be awake to your duty."

"Isabella's coming," I told him. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"It does not."

"It wouldn't," I reminded him and started for the door.

The stage passed as I came outside the post. Young Foley who drove the north end had obligingly pulled his team down to a walk so that the teamsters waiting outside the warehouses might have a chance to notice that somebody in particular was riding on the front seat with him. One freighter, blanketing his steaming horses, turned to

stare and said "Whoo-ee!" softly to nobody. "Look after my team a minute," he requested the driver behind him. "I'm going down to Louis'."

Immediately there began a general movement on the part of everyone in sight along the road, toward Papineau's hotel. I became aware of it when two or three had passed me walking down the middle of the road. I stuck to the foot-path on the side and was marching at ordinary drill time till I overhauled Tim Wade's wife about half way down. She was under full steam but barely making steerway on account of being shod in carpet-slippers. Now it was part of my duty of course to be around the terminal whenever a stage got in and look over any new arrivals. But I couldn't see where she had a call to be getting her feet wet, not being on the reception committee. Three more teamsters passed me on the road with the young assistant from the French post crowding them close. Somebody stepped on my heels.

"Mark time back there," I ordered, "till the front is clear!"

There was a disgusted Scotch grunt in answer. "For a young man presumed to be in health," Malcolm stated, "you're an almighty tejious walker."

"I thought Isabella meant nothing to you," I said as we took the road for it. Malcolm cast a hurried glance over his shoulder and stepped out. "We'll be trampled," he muttered. "I'm an old man—God spare me fra stumblin' the now. 'Tis to

safeguard the Company's interest I'm here. Remember that, Constable, if I'm crushed in the mob."

It was not as bad as that of course; there were not enough people in the Landing to have made a real mob. But such as had caught the exciting rumor were there, moving intently from all directions toward a common center—Papineau's hotel. And all drawn by the same amiable curiosity to behold the probably beautiful stranger arriving in town. With the Landing boasting but six white women, outside the missions, there was no time to be considering the niceties of polite behavior. It behooved every man to be present and display his wares.

Malcolm halted me as we bore down on the stage, just stopping in front of Louis Papineau's.

"'Tis for the Duncan," he wheezed. "Look!"

Captain Duncan was standing there with Brandy Shannon and somehow the space in front of him was left clear by the crowd that pressed on either hand.

"His daughter, most like," Malcolm commented. "'Twould not be past him to have a grown daughter; honest competition is beyond the man. Yon's a proper pirate face, Constable, for all his shore-going clothes and the fine whisker he has. A black Scot and unscrupulous in proportion. I could never abide burly men."

I made no pretense of listening to him, I was looking for Halliday in the crowd. The moment

the stage had stopped Captain Duncan was at its side, capably flanked by Brandy Shannon. He reached over and lifted the young lady bodily from the seat, a significant display of his physical prowess for any who cared to notice it. Midway in her flight she kissed him on the center of his glossy black beard and they started walking the instant her feet were on the ground.

Young Foley had displayed remarkable dash for his part; the sleigh was still moving when he flung his reins aside and leaped to the ground. He must have foreseen instantly that he would not participate in any elegant handing down of his charming passenger. Rushing to the rear of his sleigh he tore at the pile of baggage and plucked forth two heavy grips. He pressed forward to offer these and was just in time to be blocked by Brandy Shannon.

"Here!" I heard Brandy say, and as the eager youth surrendered his burden, Brandy thrust a coin into his unsuspecting hand and whisked away.

It was a wholesale snubbing, a gesture by which not only the driver, a youth of excellent repute, but all those other worthies gathered in honest curiosity, were rebuked and made to appear a vulgar rabble come to stare at quality.

Just then I discovered Halliday, not as one of the gaping embarrassed crowd around the stage, nor standing apart, a dignified onlooker, as Malcolm Fraser or myself. He was on the other side of the street, marching sedately toward his office and

could easily have been returning from delivering a message to some place beyond. There was the receipt book under his arm to prove it. His tactics worked as smoothly as if rehearsed; he met the Captain Duncan and his daughter on the narrow path, a little way before they reached the corner. Naturally he must step aside into the snow and raise his hat politely to the escort. The Captain stopped a little unwillingly, and introduced Halliday to the daughter, as I gathered by Halliday's removing his cap altogether. He stood there after they had gone and I fancied that Brandy Shannon, passing with the baggage, put out his tongue at him.

"The boy's deep!" I exclaimed. "I wouldn't have thought it of him."

"You wouldn't," Malcolm murmured beside me. "The Duncan'll be harvestin' a power of local custom the now, no doubt. Aye, an' some of the lads'll be breakin' their hairts over the lass no doubt. 'Tis a most depressin' thought! Come away up to the office, Constable, and there'll be a taste of the whusky."

IV

It is no more than justice to old Malcolm Fraser to note that the first part of his gloomy prophecy was fulfilled. Duncan's post harvested a power of local custom. Nearly all the transients in the Landing, teamsters, travelers, and the crews at work building scows, as well as a good many of the permanent residents, found occasion to tramp out to the place on the pretext of wanting to buy something. And most of them did part with some of their money too, before they got back, for Brandy Shannon showed himself to be a weather-wise old sailorman; he put on every inch of sail his spars would bear, if that's the proper seafaring expression. He sold many a shop-worn Mackinaw shirt of such clamorous checks as an Indian might blush to wear, for a third more than it would have cost outside. And summer coming on too. I saw the poor simps grinning over sterile slabs of tobacco, petrified to granite hardness, that he'd pushed off on them while saving his fresher stock for customers that really wanted something to smoke or chew and not a souvenir. I didn't go near the place myself but Tommy Thomas reported this to me.

"That Brandy Shan' he's pickin' up the foot before he's puttin' down, Mr. Lynch, an' get the face all red like you got."

Gene Halliday of course, took no part in the general attempt at buying out the junk in the Captain's post. He held the bulge on everyone from having been regularly introduced to Isabella and he had better sense than let himself be confused with the common herd by gaping around the place. On the second Sunday after she arrived I saw him marching out that way and without his receipt book under his arm, so I knew he was making a social call. This was rapid progress considering the old Captain's previous attitude toward guests, and I felt proud of Halliday. I saw he was a painstaking, determined little cuss and it seemed as if the trouble I'd taken to cultivate him was not going to be wasted. And I meant it should work both ways of course; I planned to take him in hand as soon as there was time and gradually train him out of his historical way of looking at everything including me and himself. Anyhow the chance of his coming gracefully to earth was good if his case with Isabella Duncan went ahead and she proved to have anything of her father in her makeup. The old Captain had never impressed me as a man that would encourage illusions of any kind around him.

I met Isabella shortly after that and by the grace of good luck I had on my Little Robin Redbreast clothes instead of the fatigue gear I wore most of the time. She was talking to Halliday in front of his door when I came out of the postoffice and he indicated politely that I was to approach and be

introduced. It passed off without a hitch and I managed to scrape up a little harmless conversation to fill in while I was getting a good look at her. She was slender in a long-limbed kind of way; one of those young women that stand an inch or so taller and step a little farther than you'd suppose. What impressed me most about her though, after the horribly expensive-looking coat she wore, were her eyes. At first glance they seemed strongly to resemble her father's; the same full, dark brows above them. But hers I saw right off were trained; they could smile and droop and say please at exactly the right places. And when she opened the thick lashes wide so I could look right at them they were so deep and black that it almost rattled me. I couldn't pretend to say what it was I saw in them, but I swear there was something. Apparently I had just then asked her how she liked the Landing or some such whiskered query for she was answering me.

"I'm sure that I shall love it!" she declared. "And Mr. Halliday has been telling me something of the picturesque people I shall meet here."

"Well, he knows us all," I agreed. And then, if it would have done any good I guess I would have blushed at the sheer fat-headedness of my break.

"Oh, you are among them," she said, and giggled at me with her eyes. "You were very favorably mentioned too. But I was warned of the dashing figure of the Mounted Policeman before I left Victoria."

Yes, she'd been in Victoria; in school there all these years and her poor old father so lonely out here! She had decided suddenly to surprise him instead of going to her Mother's people in Manila as he expected, when her schooling was finally finished. It was her duty really to comfort him in every way she could and she was so pleased at finding it much more interesting than she expected, especially the people. There was more along this same line before I drew off and left Halliday the field.

No doubt, if I'd been a little younger and a good deal more impulsive than I am, I'd have decided that her revered sire couldn't possibly be on the wrong side and have a daughter like that. But after going back to my barracks and studying myself in a shaving mirror, I couldn't do it. The general effect was dashing enough except for my collar being a shade too tight for my neck. And I realized that I couldn't go about forever with my chin stuck out like a rookie in his first outfit of regimentals. No, I would have to stick to my fatigue dress and my suspicions and take it out in envying Halliday his flying start at romance.

I probed him tenderly the next time I saw him, with the view to learning if he appreciated his luck.

"What impression, if any," I asked him, "have you got of Miss Duncan's—?"

He checked me right off. "You mustn't presume on our friendly relations to ask me to discuss Miss Duncan, Constable. It's not—well, I just don't care to do it, you see."

"I do," I said solemnly. "But you won't let any thought of possible rivalry come between us, will you?"

"Why, no, I—" he stammered.

"I'm in the service, you know," I kept on, "and Duty's first, Halliday. I'm wedded to it, practically, and there's other reasons I can't mention. I can see how attractive she is, how—how— She reminds me so keenly of someone— But I won't go into it—I can't."

I choked off with a heavy sigh and did my best to look like a man that would carry a secret sorrow to the end.

"I'm so sorry to hear it, Constable," he sympathized. "And I must apologize for being abrupt with you."

But I didn't think his lying showed half the finish that mine did; relief was sticking out all over him. I drew out my handkerchief and blew my nose as feelingly as possible.

"And what impression," I asked him, again, "do you get of Captain Duncan?"

"She's wonderful!" he declared. "So—so—well, I can't—"

"I imagined she would be," I put in.

"And her life has been so remarkable too; born in the tropics—her mother was of a noted Spanish family in Manila—and living on the Captain's trading-schooner till her mother died and he quit the sea and put her in a convent school. One would readily expect her to be thrilled by a color-

ful place like this, and she does. I mean she is. She thinks this country's immense!"

"It's big all right."

"No, its people and the history of it," he explained. "Do you know, Constable, I haven't met anyone out here who sees it in such perspective as she does."

"Is that possible!"

"Yes, indeed. And she's tremendously interested in learning too; all the background of the fur trade and the Indian life fascinates her. She's as keen as everything about learning her father's business. I tell you it expands one's own outlook to meet a—anyone with such a vital appreciation of the ambitions and dreams that built this country. You've no idea!"

"I have so," I insisted. "I have an idea you misunderstood me. It was the Captain I asked about in the first place."

"Oh," said Halliday. "Well, he's her father—"

"That explains it," I told him. "And the old gentleman is really as genial and friendly as anyone after you get on a proper footing with him, isn't he? A lot of these yaps went out there to rubber and ask questions when he first came, so he was bound to snub them for being obnoxious and inquisitive. He's not understood; isn't that the way of it?"

"Frankly, I believe it is," Halliday admitted. "I've only met him a few times, but that's my impression. He's far from being dour; at least I find

him so. He discusses everyone freely and asks after their doings."

I pricked up my ears at that. "Mind you don't let anybody pump you. A telegraph operator, you know."

He gave me a lofty smile. "I'd hardly be forgetting that, Constable."

That was Halliday's version of the Duncan and I could not blame him for thinking as he did at the time. I hoped for his own sake that if he got really serious with Isabella it would be a whirlwind affair and settled one way or the other before I got a case against the Captain. I didn't want to hurt his feelings by letting him suspect that I meant to use him as I was virtually forced to do. Then there was the chance that having his daughter with him would restrain the old Captain in the future if only her interest in the fur business began at home.

Brandy Shannon made a point of stopping at my barracks to give me his own account of the first effects of Isabella on life at the Duncan post.

"There's always bad luck wit' a super-cargo aboard, no mind if it's on'y cruisin' ashore. Not that I begrudge the exter work it makes, if on'y the Captain hadn't to be worrit."

"What does the Captain worry about?" I inquired.

"He don't. Not really. But he's serious be natur'; serious an' dignified as is proper for a ship's master. An' th' gurrl she's onstiddy and always

to be doin' somethin' or other. If it's not one thing she's demandin' to have explained or wantin' to change, why, to be sure it's another. An' that's very bad luck for a ship, Constable; demoralizin' the crew and distractin' the master. On'y yesterday, what do ye think she was at?"

"What?" I asked.

"Perusin' the Captain's log-book!"

"No!" I exclaimed. "Not actually!"

"Well, almost," he insisted. "But manin' to do so, mind ye, if I hadn't stepped in at the moment."

"Heavens!" I said. "Trying to read the log-book! What did the Captain say?"

"I didn't tell him," Brandy admitted. "He'd on'y be worrit."

I wondered what the devil the Captain's log-book was but I dare not ask him then. For it is not intended that you should get the impression that I was a confidant of Brandy Shannon. On the contrary he had steadfastly refused to come into my barracks during all the time I knew him. He wanted no one to think he'd be having any truck with me, as he put it. As a result we had few conversations during the winter months but I knew that now it was spring again he'd be coming along at times to squat his ape's figure in my open doorway and air his grievances to me. And at that he'd never tell me anything, but sit and wag his head that was much the shape and color of a cured ham, and mourn about nothing whatever. I think he did it because I was Irish and he had the idea that I

enjoyed lamentation for its own sake. And generally he'd find himself insulted and leave in a huff.

"I see our bright young telegrapher going out your way pretty often lately," I said. "It's a wonder to me you'd put up with him."

"Is ut now?" he demanded. "I see I must be puttin' ye to rights on the tiligraph lad. He's a proper dacent gintleman, he is, and that's more'n could be truthfully said for others, Mr. Lynch. There's people right in the room here that's not the half of him fer quality and politeness. Ye heard what I said, Mr. Lynch?"

"Sure, I heard you."

"I'll say more thin! The lad's under me protection, bear in mind, and if there's any that thinks to run a ranicaboo on him it'll be me to settle wit'. It's a warnin', Mr. Lynch, an' ye'll do well to govern yerself by it."

"I'll think about it," I promised.

"An' much good it'll do ye! But ye can hear, Mr. Lynch; there's to be no pryin' or bulldozin' of the young lad, understand. He's not to be tret as I been, if I'd on'y let ye!"

It was never safe for me to depend on anything Brandy Shannon said at such times. He'd either be lying about something or telling the truth in such a way as to make me think he was lying, so that I wouldn't believe him. Why was he taking up the cudgels for young Halliday? Or was he? I couldn't decide which.

It was about the time that spring began doing its

best to make us forget the past winter; the river ice broke up and set out on its long journey to the Arctic, the snow disappeared and a layer of thin and sticky mud covered the ground in its turn. This was soon dried however, by the warm new sun that seemed to like us again and have some regrets at leaving us each day. There was just that softness in the air that one could relish after the long dormant winter; little lemon-green leaves began to show on the poplars along the river banks. And the air was full of the sing-song speech of Swede carpenters and the noise they made hammering the scows together. Most of the Indians that lived in the villages on either side of the Landing, had returned from their winter's trapping and spent hours at standing around in the trade-rooms of the posts making up their minds whether to take a red blanket or a green one. And as usual they generally compromised by deciding the old blankets would do if their squaws got busy and quilted rabbit skins to one side of them, and so chose big black hats for everybody with a few yards of colored print for the women. There was more credit to be earned at scow-running, so what was the difference?

Old Malcolm Fraser was hopping about like a flea at a dog-fight, trying to watch his assistants at the post and out in the warehouses. He could never be sure that his helpers would get the last possible value for the Company's stuff in a trade, and now that the scows were being loaded with

goods from the warehouses there was always the horrible possibility that it might not check out exactly as it came in. He admitted that he had not been short so much as a piece of twine in the fifteen years he had held the job, but Malcolm was never one to grow careless on the strength of his record. Not with the chance of his being charged with the shortage.

A long day of this sort would leave him all tattered in the nerves and weak from sheer output of worry so that he was obliged to have recourse to some kind of a mild sedative to calm himself down. I used to make a point of dropping into his office during the evenings while the strain was so great, knowing that my presence would soothe him. And moreover I saved him many a time from the curse that is reckoned to fall on the man who drinks alone.

I was there on such an errand of mercy one evening when I saw Halliday and Isabella Duncan pass. They were strolling along too aimlessly to be going anywhere and she had handfuls of soft fuzzy willow buds. He carried a leafy twig of poplar and used it to gesture about with and ornament the conversation generally. To me it was a very touching picture they made, stopping a moment to laugh with each other and swaying apart as they walked and then back together till they almost touched in that pleasant careless way that young folks have when they feel happy and vague

inside. I called Malcolm to the window to look at them.

"Doesn't it warm your hard, mercenary old heart just to see them?" I asked him. "There's a sample of what a live, earnest young man can accomplish in a short time by concentrating. And you wondered if he had the discretion to be a mere telegrapher! He's not only got discretion but discrimination, if I know a good-looking girl when I see one."

"Hut!" Malcolm sniffed. "'Tis a particular gift that ye have for acquiring misapprehensions, Constable. The lass is a full inch the taller! Na'thing wull come of it."

"You'll see," I insisted. "That boy's got a mind, and imagination to go with it. And imagination rules the world, you know."

"Wurrds!" he scoffed. "Bare empty wurrds. I doot 'twas Halliday himsel' tell't ye them. Na'thing wull come of it! I've obsairved the lass; there's distruction and a turmoil in her, and 'twill no be keppit wi' wurrds, however thrillin' to the ear. The Duncan was an onprincipled free-booter at sea, Constable, turnin' his hand at contraband of a dozen kinds amang th' islands of th' Malay Straits. An' born wi' the taste for it, I doot, fra generations of cattle-thievin' ancestry. 'Twould be no secret," Malcolm explained, "except to they ones that should know of such things. Like yersel' for example, Constable."

"Go on?" I said, "and tell me the rest of your

dream. What would that matter in Halliday's young life? Live and let live, is his motto."

"She'd be th' kind to adore th' hand that cuffs her, which he couldna' do as ye'll admit. He's a poor sort, that one, and summat afeard of life when he's no drunken wi' wurrds. A man fu' of wurrds will na' prosper."

"Rats! You're full of prejudice and superstitions. Halliday will shed all that nonsense the minute he comes up against something real in life. He'll surprise you before he's done."

"He'll be et." And that was the last word Malcolm would say on the subject.

Probably I would have dismissed his whole attitude toward Duncan as being the natural antagonism of a good Company man against all independent traders, if I hadn't got a letter from Headquarters next day. I was depressed by it in two ways; first it advised me that the customary spring jag had been enjoyed by Indians in the Slave Lake country in spite of the previous advices I had received on the subject. In spite of hell, I told myself. The other thing that pulled down my gay spirits was in the comment Old Fury, the inspector, directed to me. It was fairly clear to him that I had been persistently under-rating the intelligence of possible suspects in my district; that whoever it was doing this mischief showed far closer knowledge of Police habits and character than I showed of criminals and crime. And it was therefore indicated that I should take advantage of the summer

season for enlarging the scope of my investigations with a view to bringing under observation the most unlikely person in the place, and so on.

I hated to have Old Fury repeating himself that way, since he had harped on that string at least twice before. And I wasn't underestimating anyone at all; it was only that I couldn't find a way to fasten the job onto my favorite object of suspicion. I could see clearly how things were shaping themselves. Pretty soon there would be a little shake-up put in orders, with some bright young buck coming to take over my detachment along with full particulars of all the wires I had laid. I'd just about draw a ticket for some misbegotten place with a stiff-necked sergeant over me to make life a miserable affair. And of course the man who followed me at the Landing would harvest where I had so painstakingly sown, which would all be pointed out as contributing to the splendid efficiency of the Force. And up in smoke would go my pleasant dreams of gaining stripes and retiring eventually, a sergeant or better. A mighty poor outlook when I needed to be in a proper condition of mind to face the annual curse of summer mosquitoes that was about due to fall upon the land.

I was just considering the wisdom of taking a nap to rid myself of these glooms when I saw someone coming toward my barracks. After a moment I recognized him as Wallis, the man to whom Tommy Thomas had paid his visit beyond the Hay Lakes during the previous winter. It couldn't be

anybody else, of course. Wallis was the only man in the whole country who dared to carry a cane and wear white shirts and collars under all circumstances. It was about time, I remembered, for him to show up at the Landing with the yearly harvest of his Beaver trappers and hunters. He'd fooled me by walking so fast when he should have been strolling languidly as usual. Being in the mood I was I hoped he'd be more than ordinarily offensive.

"Good morning, 'Ighness," I greeted him. "Welcome to hour 'umble cottage, sir, an' be pleased to 'ave a chair."

"Blast your chair!" he snorted. "You hear? I say blast your blasted chair!"

"That doubles it," I said. "Sit on the bed then!"

"I have no wish to occupy your probably verminous bed, either. I didn't come here to sit about, confound it!"

"Then why all this red-in-the-faceness?" I asked.

Wallis didn't answer. He was glaring about the room, with his gander-blue eyes fairly snapping.

"Here," he ordered, "take these and file 'em." He extended an ungloved hand over my desk and twiddled his white fingers. A half-dozen strands of longish black hair fell out of his grasp and others that clung between his fingers were poked free with the end of his cane.

"Combings from the tail of your Ludship's favorite 'unter?" I inquired. "Oh, I am so grate-

ful, sir, and I'll treasure them most carefully, I will."

"Don't be an utter ass if you can avoid it, Lynch. File these and give me a receipt. Find an envelope."

Out of gratitude for his insufferable manner, I dug up an old envelope and put the hairs into it. "How shall I mark them, now?"

"Lost and found, I'd say. He lost them and I found them between my fingers. Return them if he asks it and pays your fee; I suppose you'd get a fee out of it. And I shall want a receipt."

"Who?" I demanded. "Who will ask for them?"

"This unspeakable sea-captain of yours here, Duncan. Blest if I can see why he's tolerated!"

"Yet you're troubling yourself to bring this lock of his hair to me? He'll be touched by it!"

"Don't be an idiot, Lynch. Sign your name on this." And being the faultlessly correct person he was, Wallis must hand me his engraved calling-card. I took it and wrote, "Rec'd hairs. Jos. Lynch, Con."

"Thanks," he returned. "But here—specify whiskers—not hair."

When I had made the alteration he put the card carefully back in his note-case and picked up his cane. "Now I must be going," he said.

"You will not," I told him firmly. "You will sit down and tell me all about it, if I have to use force and violence on you."

"Eh? But the matter is closed and it is no part of your official business, you understand."

"It doesn't need to be," I explained. "I ain't no thin red hero; I'm a human being that's fairly working inside with curiosity and it's got be satisfied. Out with it!"

"I doubt it—you're being human," he informed me.

"Sit down," I ordered.

He sighed in a bored, fretful kind of way and seated himself. "Very well then, but do the honors, can't you? Man, have you got no breedin'? Rummage about and produce something liquid and Scotch."

I decided I'd take a chance on him. For with all I'd heard of him, pro and con, Wallis struck me as likely to take the sporting view of any unofficial gesture of mine, so I produced. He tasted it and admitted that it wasn't quite filthy, aside from being raw and dankish to the tongue. I apologized for not having a siphon of Schwepps to dress it up with but he said never mind, he didn't expect anything better considering that I'd probably blackmailed it from some dive-keeping Johnny around the Landing. It pained me that he should speak so slightingly of Louis Papineau's present to me but I said nothing. It was all very like Wallis from the little I knew and the lot I'd heard concerning him.

Perhaps it ought to be explained just here, that Wallis had most any kind of a reputation you

wanted. It depended on whom you talked with. Most people had casually put him down as being very sparingly outfitted with brains when he first appeared in Edmonton around the fur market. And there was enough in his appearance and manner to justify it; one of those thin, lanky young individuals like thousands of the kind that used to come out from the old country to look around and patronize the colonies in their dull, well-bred way. Something vacant and unoccupied about their faces and the studied insolence they had in common made the average grown man deeply irritated whenever he caught one of them looking at him. Wallis had much of that silly-ass way about him, except that he never chose to affront the local inhabitants by wearing a monocle or spats. He was blond and lantern-jawed, with a pale blue eye that could insult you without the least difficulty, whenever he chose. And always utterly correct in attire for every occasion. I doubt like the devil if he could have been forced to shoot a rabbit when he had on a pheasant shooting costume.

He had got an outfit together the following summer after he arrived and taken an extended trip out to the Peace and beyond, looking the country over and saying nothing much to anyone. The wise old Company factors at the trading posts he visited all voted him to be the Prince of nuts and the impression got about that his people ought to be warned against letting him run loose. And when it became known that he was having a post built somewhere in the Hay Lakes country and was

about to set up as a fur trader, there was frequent reference made to a "fool and his money" by the wise ones. And all the Company men got ready for a long, loud laugh.

That was five years before and I suppose that a lot of them were still waiting for the signal to begin. It hadn't come off. He'd got hold of this fellow Malotte that Tommy Thomas spoke so bitterly about, and proceeded to annex most of a tribe of wild Beavers that made their home in that country. Nobody knew just what he did to them or for them but he got to be their nichie and Big Okima, and he was cashing in on the arrangement in a really enterprising way. About the man's real personality, nobody seemed to know much. I heard it explained once by someone who claimed that Wallis had an exaggerated sense of humor; that he was the first man to penetrate the economic joke by which the old concerns got fur from the Indians. I suppose that referred to the traditional scale of three pounds to the dollar for all goods, against fur at a fraction of its wholesale price; an arrangement calculated to keep Mr. Indian perpetually in debt for the food he ate the year before. It does seem like a species of joke too, when they tell about the good old days when the Indian had to pile beaver pelts, one on the other, as high as an old muzzle-loading rifle was long, in order to get it. I understand they made the rifles so long that a man needed a prop under the barrel to aim one.

Anyone could still take his choice in estimating

Wallis; those that thought of him as a joker could point for proof to the steadily increasing amount of fur he brought in each spring. Among the big fur companies there appeared to be some trouble, however, in seeing that as a joke. At the same time, if the stories of him were true, Wallis did enough foolish things to entirely justify the element that reckoned him to be a fool. There were the stories of his sending a man out to Edmonton in mid-winter, the Lord knows how many hundred miles, for a packet of needles for his gramophone, and his ordering his man Malotte to teach the Beavers to play football so that he could attend in state when they had games. There was no end of gossip about him; dilating on his arrogance or pig-headedness or the supercilious way he had toward nearly everybody. Many a ragged, frost-bitten old teamster barely making a living on the winter freight trails, found comfort in these proofs that Wallis was a fool; and ignored the brazen success he was making of his business.

And here he was now sitting in my place, dressed in outing tweeds, carrying a cane and dogskin gloves in his hands and looking as useless as possible, after bringing me a tuft of the lion's beard in his fingers. A decidedly cool young buck, I was beginning to think.

"Now then," I said, "let's have it round by round."

"Don't get the impression, Lynch, that I've engaged in any vulgar pugilistic brawls."

"But there are the whiskers," I pointed out to him.

"True. Still I had no intention of plucking them at the time. Forced to pinion the brute to get his attention. Tried to roar at me, mind you, when I'd gone there specially to kick him."

"Kick him? What for?"

"Poachin'," explained Wallis. "I always kick poachers; only way to curb 'em. He'd sent a spy of sorts among my lads, tryin' to broach fancy skins off them. Marten and silver fox, you know. Couldn't have that!"

"I heard about it," I said.

"Eh? How's that?"

"I happened to hear of it. Go on."

"No more to it. Went there meanin' to kick him about the shop but he wouldn't have it. Shockin'ly vigorous old beggar, wriggled in his chair like a trapped mink while I had his whiskers in hand. Practically had him subdued though when that monkey-faced understrapper came in."

"Who was it, Brandy Shannon?"

"I wouldn't know really," Wallis answered. "A disagreeable beast of some sort."

"What did you do then?" I persisted.

"Fought a minor rear-guard action and retired. Fended with my stick, I imagine, or something of the kind."

It sounded all very casual and bothersome to Wallis in the way he told it, and somehow I could almost believe him.

"Must have been a very interesting occasion," I told him. "I wish I could have been present."

"Understand, Lynch, it's none of your bally affair! I'd not be tellin' it, you know, except you Police chaps are reckoned to be practically solid brains, what?"

"Nothing," I said.

"I shouldn't want your nose in it, understand, though we've agreed to dismember each other at sight, this seafaring person and I."

"Better tread soft," I reminded him. "I'd be forced to repress actual violence of any sort."

Wallis took a crested cigarette case from his pocket and offered me an imported smoke. "Nothing will probably come of it," he remarked. "I'm stopping here till my furs come down river. Catch him outside his premises likely and be able to give him a sound kickin'."

"There's little chance of it," I said. "You'd best call it a job and drop it. And by the way, don't be too rough on this Tommy Thomas if he should fall into your hands again. Scare him all you like, but nothing rough."

"Thomas? Thomas? I wouldn't know the man," Wallis declared.

He was staring out of the window just then at something I could not see. "Your blasted Captain's been— Dash it, Lynch," he exclaimed, "what do I see there? Would that be one of the Indian wenches coming?"

I had a look; it was no less a person that Isabella

Duncan just turning onto the street from the road that led to her father's post.

"Indian, your eye!" I told him. "That's Miss Duncan."

Wallis goggled at me a moment. "Not this Captain—?"

"Sure," I said, "Captain Duncan's daughter. Too bad you made such a scene up there this morning, isn't it? Otherwise I might—"

"Probably just as well," he concluded. "Be likely to turn out to have mission ankles and a wretched Scottish accent. I can't bear 'em! Something uncouth about such squeaking and tooting that rends me!"

He was keeping his eyes on the window while he was saying this, even getting up from his chair to hold her in view. Then, before I knew what he was about, he had taken my field glasses that were hanging on the wall. He stood openly in the doorway and focused them on her, not fifty yards away.

"Rangy lookin' filly," he commented to himself. "I say, Lynch, I'll withdraw the ankles. Very good job indeed! Be too bad about the accent though. She's darkish; certain hint of style about her, what? No half-breed, I'd say. Um—probably giggles with a Gaelic twang. Horrible sound! Know her, Lynch? Know anything about her?"

"Sure I do."

"How's she bred on the dam's side?"

"Her mother was Spanish," I replied.

"No!" he exclaimed. "Blast it, Lynch, why wasn't I cautioned about this?" He fumbled with the adjustment of the glasses and continued to gaze at Isabella, now almost opposite us. "Can't pretend to understand it," he muttered. "Ruffianly old father, too! What's this place she's turning into just now?" he demanded.

"That's the telegraph office."

"Um—probably filing a message. Tell me, Lynch, does she giggle atrociously?"

"She doesn't giggle at all. Not that it's any of your business of course."

"Eh? I see. Tell you what we'd better do, Lynch. When she pops out of that telegraph place, just yoo-hoo will you have her over here and meet me, what?"

His confounded nerve riled me. "Like a lot of hell I will! Furthermore," I went on, "I'll undertake to do some kicking on my own account if you make another break like that."

"Fine—fine!" he applauded me. "Spoken like a man and all that. Girl's a lady, no?"

"Certainly she is, too much of a lady for—"

"No details necessary, Lynch. Take your judgment. You're a very ordinary sort of person of course, but I'll do it. Govern myself accordingly, eh?"

He began drawing on his gloves. "Her beastly old father you know is—"

"Where are you going?" I demanded. "I sup-

pose you've got a notion to send a telegram or something all at once."

Wallis turned back at the door and stared at me as if trying to recall where he'd seen me before.

"Good deal of an ass as well, aren't you?" he inquired. "None of your business, mind, that about the whiskers. Naturally I'm drifting across to talk to the young lady myself. Couldn't depend on you to recognize an accent."

He turned back again after he got outside the door. "About her vulgar old parent; he's poachin' on everyone. You knew that, didn't you? Strikes me you'd make an end of it."

With that he strode off directly for the telegraph office, walking rapidly and jamming his cane down at every third or fourth step.

After Wallis had gone into the telegraph office I made myself comfortable at my window and prepared to do some of the shrewd observing that is counted to be second nature in a competent Policeman. Whether he was to make a success of his overture to Isabella or not, I stood to gain a crumb or two of information about one or the other of them. I was prepared to be surprised if he failed to make a go of it and prepared to be astonished at her if he did. And if that sounds like a contradiction, I must remind you that this was back in the days when a lady could still be insulted. For all her friendly encouraging ways I couldn't imagine Isabella permitting herself to be accosted by Wallis or anyone else without the ice having first been broken between them.

The minutes passed and nothing happened. Wallis did not reappear with the fine edge of his assurance blunted and bent as I expected, nor did Isabella come sailing indignantly out of the place. On the sudden fear that Halliday might be idiot enough to introduce them I went across to see for myself what was happening. Halliday had not introduced them. I made sure of that from the way he glared at Wallis' back and hovered uncertainly at the rail that penned him in with his telegraph instruments. Wallis was propped against

his cane in the middle of the room in earnest conversation with Isabella. At least he was conversing earnestly while Isabella stood as though on the point of leaving at the very moment.

"All of which," Wallis was saying, "makes it urgent, you see. Such a matter couldn't be left to accident. Point is, who shall I get to introduce us? Just make a choice and I'll attend to it right off. Preserve the groggy old conventions and silence wagging tongues. Now who shall it be?" Wallis leaned forward hopefully for her answer. He gave the appearance of having done all he could. Isabella's gaze had been fixed intently on the bare wall before her and there was a pointed silence when Wallis stopped speaking.

"Come," he persisted, "who shall it be?"

She gave him a glance then and the beginnings of a smile that was faintly mocking.

"My father," she murmured.

Wallis stood gaping at the door after she had gone and I had to relieve the tension by clearing my throat. He wheeled about at the sound and gaped at me for a change. I imagined he was searching for something in his mind.

"But dash it, Lynch," he burst out, "her violent old sire would be prejudiced, you know! Bound to be, what?"

"I'm afraid so," I agreed. "Especially just now."

"But that's absurd, really," he protested, "I always kick poachers! Done it for years. Come outside, will you; it's stifling in here."

Halliday was concealing a polite grin when I glanced back from the door. Wallis stopped outside to stare again at Isabella, now moving serenely down the road.

"Lynch, it looks bad," he complained. "Why'd she specify her father anyway? Couldn't have known of my having words with him this morning, do you think?"

"How could she help knowing?" I demanded. "She was probably there at the time."

"But look here! Be no sense in her stipulating her blasted governor in that case."

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

"How the devil does she expect me to manage it?"

"Maybe she doesn't," I suggested.

From the blank look he gave me I could have sworn that such an idea had never occurred to Wallis. "I'm no mind reader," I went on, "but I couldn't see any great anxiety on her part to meet you. I was right there you know, if she'd wanted a referee."

"Dammit, man, how can you be such an idiot? Of course she wanted to meet me. Couldn't help it! No—no, Lynch, you stick to the blessed old law; it's your dish. You've got no flair for this sort of thing, I see."

I wasn't certain about the flair, so I couldn't give him an argument.

"Tell you what," he suggested. "Just dash across to your fort there and fetch me the whiskers

I left, will you? I've barely time to finish the matter before lunch."

"What do you plan to do?" I asked. "Going up to apologize to the old man or fight him a duel?"

"I shall go and give him the thorough bootin' I had in mind at first," Wallis announced. "Dispose of that detail, you see. Clear the way for his having me stop to lunch and meet the family. Get going, Lynch; I can't be waiting around this way."

"Not any," I said firmly.

"Eh?" he stared at me.

"No case. I keep the whiskers till they're called for as is customary with lost and found articles. And don't you go out there again for football practice either. In the first place, you'd probably get your neck broken, and in the second place I won't have it. Understand?"

"But it's none of your dashed business!"

"I know it isn't," I said, "but I'm making it my business. So you can just drop matters where they are. What you'd better do is to put in some time forgetting all about the young lady and her father. Nothing serious is likely to happen if you never got an introduction to her. It's all in a lifetime and you'll both manage to get along, no doubt."

He didn't exactly say that he would follow my advice. In fact when I left him he was glaring furiously and making remarks about impudent public servants. But as I didn't see anything of him in the dining-room at Louis Papineau's when I went there to eat, I imagined he was meditating in

his room. I was grateful enough for the diversion he furnished, but it couldn't be allowed to upset my personal plans. They called for lots of undisturbed tranquillity all around so that Halliday could get on with his romance and continue to improve his relations with the old Captain Duncan. After all that I had in mind was accomplished and I'd got a sergeant's or even a corporal's rank, then Wallis could be as boisterous as he liked.

He appeared to have forgotten all about it when I met him at the river next day. His fur had arrived, floated down on big rafts from the Mirror Rapids at the mouth of Lesser Slave. The stuff was in the charge of a crew of his Beavers, stubby bullet-headed mugs they were. Wallis was overseeing the transfer of the cargo to freight-wagons that he had ready for moving it in to Edmonton. I say that he was overseeing the job but I don't mean to indicate that he was doing anything. Far from it. He sat on an empty packing-case well out of the way and rested his chin on the end of his cane and watched. And those Beavers were laying to their work in a manner that was surprising. There was no stalling around in the usual uninspired way of an Indian confronted with manual labor; they shouldered bales of fur and scrambled up the bank with them like a gang of Swedes on piecework.

After I shared Wallis' seat and helped him watch for a few minutes, I saw where a lot of their enthusiasm came from. There was one big fellow

among them, a fine active cut of a man with a hawk's face on him, that supplied it. He took no part in the labor but if one tarried on his return journey from the wagons a sharp nasal yelp would move him on again. He was everywhere, watching the loading, indicating which bales to fetch next, or the lashing down of the tarpaulin covers when the wagon was loaded. Once a man slipped, clambering up with his load, and was about to fall with it, but this big fellow was there on the instant to help him. He applied the toe of his shoe-pac where it would do the most good without breaking any bones and the Indian recovered his balance instantly.

"That's a hard-working straw-boss," I said to Wallis. "Who is he?"

Wallis explained that this was Malotte; that Malotte made all actual contacts between him and the Beavers. Wallis was a sort of king, as I got it, and Malotte was prime minister, responsible to the crown for everything except fires, floods and other acts of God.

"Saves me troublin' over details," Wallis explained. "Can't manage the beastly language anyway, so I leave everything to him."

"And how do you manage him, by bribery and playing on his vanity?"

"Certainly not," he declared. "I cane him if there's a hitch in anything. Can't be concerning myself with difficulties, you know."

I'd never heard that about him before, but it

might be true. A man that insisted on kicking poachers would probably use a cane on his chief steward. It was an original method of dealing with Indians so far as I knew.

"What is he, a French half-breed?" I asked.

"Pedigree is uncertain. His mother was a B. C. Indian, probably Carrier or Babine. Her father was white—Russian or Scandinavian—and Malotte's father was French half-breed. How would you make it out to be?"

"Complicated," I admitted.

"My very word for it! Good man though. Efficient as blazes, but undisciplined. Curious thing; he's black enough as you see, but all his children turn out white."

"How many has he?"

"No idea. Must be dozens though."

"Sounds like quite a family," I commented.

Wallis turned his head to examine me. "Don't be an idiot, Lynch! I cane the wretch for it whenever I see a new one but it's no use. He's an utter pagan, you know; hasn't got a blasted moral in him. Shockin'ly vigorous little beggars, those kids. What am I to do, eh?"

I didn't know and admitted it.

We talked of other things till the wagons were loaded and moved off a little way. It was late in the afternoon and they would be left ready for an early start to Edmonton in the morning. It was quite safe; Malotte told off a part of his Indians to camp by the wagons against the possibility of

marauding dogs becoming interested in the loads.

Wallis didn't appear at supper and I saw Louis carrying a chipped enamel beer-tray down the rear hallway to the bedrooms. He was swathed about the middle with flour-sacking that had once been white but was now a neutral shade from unrelieved service as a dish-towel. Wallis was dining alone. I felt that we other boarders owed him something for having taken exception to Louis' thumb-marks garnishing the sides of dishes. There was not a signature showing on the supper dishes. Halliday had not come in when I finished and went out to put my horse to bed.

The warm spring weather and the good feeding he got were making the old pelter shed hair like a leaky mattress. I put on a discarded sweater that I kept for stable fatigue and set in to give him a brisk massage with the curry-comb. There was a bold afterglow of sunset in the sky and the little noise and clatter of the day had stopped. That attentive kind of silence that waits on the supper-time of a small community pervaded the place.

Most people are glum at their breakfasts and too concerned and occupied for dinner to be more than a refueling. But if a man has anything to him, I have noticed, it is most apt to show when he has his supper, or just after. It's over then, whatever the day has been and he can take thought of the way it has gone. If he hasn't done much, he can be consoled; there is another to come, and to-

morrow he will surely raise Ned. It's bound to be a better one all round.

I scraped away absently with my curry-comb thinking over my own day and recognizing familiar but minor interruptions of the peaceful quiet; a dog, half-heartedly practicing his scales from the Indian village on the east, with an occasional brief response from the other side of town; a horse thumping in his stall somewhere. Tim Wade's back door opened and dish-water splashed outside before it closed again.

Isabella Duncan passed along the street as I glanced out of the stable door. Going up to the mission, it seemed, with gifts for the Sisters. Big Annie walked behind with a parcel in her hands. Isabella was a lady, no fear; she had Annie regularly engaged I'd heard, as a maid of all work. Tim Wade's wife had told me, sniffing a little at what she called "the idea." Tim wouldn't hear a word against Captain Duncan, of course, but didn't I think that was putting on airs? Didn't I suppose she was plenty able to do the little housework there was to do? Maybe she thought it was beneath her. I had made no answer, Tim's wife being the kind that doesn't require any. But I did note down for future reference, that Tim Wade defended Captain Duncan. It was a fragment; sometime I might get enough to fit the pieces together.

Except for herself and Annie, the street had been empty while Isabella was passing along to the

mission. Yet when I glanced out again it was plain that others had been aware of her. Somebody stood in the shadow of the low porch in front of Papineau's hotel, a dim outline with just a spark of fire glowing before his face. Halliday's office was lighted up to indicate his presence there, though it had long since closed for business. Farther up the street someone was singing in a plaintive, sore-throat voice; the assistant at the French post had seen her pass. Julian was a fat youth but there was the soft spring night and the thin rind of an old moon, rising above the black wall of spruce trees.

I had the notion just then to hunt up Tommy Thomas and have an account from him of the goings-on around the Duncan post. Tommy was inclined to neglect me if I did not remind him of his situation pretty regularly. And with Annie away I was fairly certain to find him at home, I thought. Halliday peered out of his window as I passed but failed to recognize me in a ragged old sweater and cap. And he wouldn't have been curious so long as I was not Isabella. I gave a glance at Papineau's porch when I came opposite the place but it was empty.

Tommy Thomas was not at home. I satisfied myself of that after I got there and had no answer to my knock. I pushed the flimsy wooden catch off the door and went in, striking matches as I did so. There was nothing for it then but to wait around out of sight till somebody turned up. I

had been certain that Tommy would be sticking close to his own fireside while Malotte was around the Landing. And Tommy would be sure to know of it an hour after the big smut got in. Indians are simple folk but they manage in their own way.

I edged into a willow thicket that was almost opposite Duncan's post and sat down to wait. Annie would be coming shortly with her mistress and then probably go home to her own cabin. I would follow her and leave word for Tommy Thomas to show. It wasn't too comfortable where I was squatting; a lot of stubby ends and broken sticks that wanted arranging so that I was barely nested down and quiet when I heard someone coming. Instead of along the road I was watching, these sounds were from behind me; footsteps and the scratch of branches against clothing. There seemed to be a path leading out of the brush just there. Two figures passed, side by side, and stopped at the edge of the clearing a dozen feet beyond me.

Against the faint light I could see Big Annie, staring up at Malotte's ugly granite face, bent over her. It was so still I could hear them breathe and the creak of her gear as she leaned back away from him. Malotte drew a sharp whistling breath and his arms were about her in a flash. He snapped her to him with a jerk that bumped her head against his great keg of a chest. They were one outline instead of two for a few seconds and from Annie came a low moaning sound between ecstasy

and agony. About half and half, I thought. It broke off in a squeak and she shrank down suddenly; Malotte had bared his long upper teeth above her head and pressed them into her scalp. Next I knew he'd grabbed her by the wrist and was gone, Annie trailing a half step behind him, in the direction of Tommy Thomas' cabin. Not a word had been spoken. Oh, they're simple folk enough, the Indians.

Undisciplined, Wallis had called Malotte but Tommy Thomas had it nearer right; Malotte was no damn good, sure. And so was the Big Annie! Or were they? I sat a few minutes thinking about it. . . . I had been a Mounted Policeman ten years.

Something told me that I would not find Tommy Thomas that night and I might as well be going along. Half-way out of my hiding place I stopped. Voices speaking and on this obscure path again! I got back inside, feeling cheap enough at the thought of being discovered there. Isabella Duncan walked past and following her came Wallis, racketing about in the overhung scrub and interrupting himself to grumble as he talked to her. "I say," he called out irritably. Isabella stopped just beyond me. There was a muttered exclamation and dry brush cracked violently before Wallis came up. "I'll be in tatters, you know, if you don't let me keep you in sight. Must be miles we've come in this jungle."

"This is the end of it," she answered. "And you

must not come any further. Indeed you shouldn't have come at all."

"Don't talk nonsense! What was I saying now? Yes, that's the point I was making; how am I to know you or you to know me if this keeps on? Leave this backing and filling to house-maids and grocers' boys. We'll be years getting anywhere at this rate and I'm keen as blazes, really, to know about you."

"What do you wish to know, Mr. Wallis?"

"Everything! Your feelings toward me, chiefly."

She laughed softly. "Should I have feelings toward you? They're neutral then."

"That would be rot," Wallis declared. "You're twenty-one, you say? Then you'd not feel neutral about any man. Neutral means neither. Aren't you a woman?"

"I presume so, why?"

"What I'm getting at is, do you not feel sensations, er—biologic disturbances in yourself at the thought of me? Know what I mean—something clinical. Fluttering pulse and a swimmish feeling in the head? What does it do when you think of belonging to me and owning me? Get sizzling noises in your ears and your palms all hot?"

He got another laugh for that. "I don't recall any such symptoms. Perhaps that's because I haven't thought of you at all."

"Um. That's not exactly true, you know," Wallis corrected her, "or I'd not be here now."

"I asked you not to come."

"I know! You said the words for it but I understand you perfectly; what you're meaning to do. Knew I should the moment I saw you."

"Indeed!" Coldly. "And what do I mean to do?"

"Make me extend myself. Chase my tail and run a fever! You'd like it. I shan't though. Life's too complicated now. Pity we hadn't come along a few hundred years ago! You'd be in a shift, barefoot and hair uncombed, herding your father's sheep on a hillside. I'd pop into sight, take a glance at you and carry you off."

"So easily?"

"Certainly. If you let out a Gaelic bleat and legged it for home I should follow. Skewer your kilted old sire to the side of his wattle house, box your ears and chuck you on top of my draft horse and go. Drive off his black cattle, too, I would."

"How romantic," Isabella mocked.

"I'm very practical, really. But let's have done with this chaffering can't we, and get on with things? I have a scheme! You go in now, all innocence and filial duty, and kiss the parent good night. I'll rush away and arrange a conveyance; meet you here in two hours—just put a few things into a bag, understand, and we'll be away and gone. Relay the horses at the stage stations and be in Edmonton tomorrow sometime."

There was a silence. "But I have no business in Edmonton."

"Hang it all, won't you understand me? We'd be married! Rouse some parson-johnny and have us tied, forelock and fetlock, hand and foot. Beyond puttin' asunder or dissolution. Beyond dispute or repair! What do you say?"

More silence. I felt terrible. Isabella answered slowly:

"I've never had—such a—proposal—before. But—"

"Doesn't matter a bit," Wallis broke in. "My fault really; should have put it better. Stupid ass! All rattled and goose-fleshed about it, I am."

"—but I'm young of course," Isabella concluded.

"Eh? Certainly, both young. Getting younger every minute, I am. Come now, there's a heart, what's the answer?"

Something moved suddenly, an arm no doubt, and a full, flat smack! rang out on the evening air. Then light rapid footfalls sounded. Wallis gurgled out: "Eh? But here—" Isabella's soft "Good night" came back sweet and clear from beyond the wagon-road. I wanted to stand up and yell.

Wallis was prancing back and forth uncertainly, cutting the air with his stick. I made out that he was elated. "By gad, eh?" he chortled. "Spirit! Fire, there! Magnificent clout she gave me. Wouldn't have done to duck it—spoiled her gesture." Mutter, mutter. "Pity she hadn't a dagger! Slash on the cheek or neck . . . splendid! Now what, eh?"

This last came out sharp and chill. Malotte had suddenly materialized on the path before him. "Ah, my boy, where have you had yourself? Don't answer, I know perfectly! You've been at the maid. Whelp! Down for it, lad. Down! I'm destroying the memory of it here and now!"

Whack! Whack! "Would, eh?" Wallis gritted. Whack! "Disgrace my fair—" Whack! "—name, eh?" Two more whacks, good ones.

I leaned forward to catch them against the light; Malotte was bent over, not clear over but far enough to be exposed. In the rear. Wallis was laying to him with his cane. Warmly, from the sound of it. And Malotte was letting him! The great buffalo could have snatched an arm off Wallis and clubbed him to death with it if he'd wanted to. Instead of which he bent over and took them, an even dozen by my count. Wallis stopped. "So! You'll do it again, eh?"

Malotte straightened himself. "Nomoya," he grunted.

"I'm suppressin' your vices this trip if it means slitting your infernal throat, understand. My position to be considered and all that! Now lead on the way we came and mind you don't lose me. Can't say I'm at all clear in the brain this moment myself. Lead on."

The minute I got back to my barracks I had one; a good stiff shot, curse or no curse. Next I stripped and donned full regimentals from spurs to cart-wheel hat. That brought me to a more

normal state of mind, gave me elbow-room mentally after what I'd been through. From the doorway I could see the light still burning in Halliday's office and hear the young Frenchman still hopefully at his song. Ah, well, I thought, they're young and it's right they should expect great things for themselves. Dreaming of some magnificent occasion no doubt, when life and time were to stand for a moment waiting. It wouldn't though. I'd seen lust and pursuit and capture, yes and retribution in the past hour. Scriptural incidents. The hard way of the transgressor and pride going before a fall.

Presently I would begin to see what I thought about it.

Wallis was on the stage when it jolted out for Edmonton next morning, sitting upright and staring glassily ahead. The wagons with his loads of precious fur followed after him. It was quite safe; Malotte put an Indian on each wagon with the driver and was to ride the last one himself. He was full of business, cursing the rest of his Beavers soundly in their native tongue as he left them.

VI

I had a caller a few days later, a dark little man who took off his worn derby and peeked in at my door before he knocked.

"Say, what is this?" he began. "You're a Policeman, ain't it, for catchin' robbers and—and swindlers? And crooks?"

"They're all more or less in my line," I said. "What's the matter?"

"You should ask it, what's the matter! Thiefs you got here. Double-crosses! Ain't a man got a right to do business and make might a couple dollars for his trouble? And expenses? Liverteams, they don't hire out you should drive them and say tenk you. Ten dollars y'unnerstand, with eating and sleeping the timster. Is it justice I should get robbed also? That's what I'm asking what's the matter, huh?"

I picked up a pencil and paper, ready to grab off the points as he made them. "Now what's the meat of this complaint? First, who are you?"

He cleared his throat. "Silverman's Ltd. Manufacturing Furriers—Wholesale, Retail. Jasper Avenue, Edmonton. High class furs only. You should see what a payroll I got."

"Is your name Silverman?"

"Sure, Jacob Silverman. Exclusive Furs."

"All right," I said, "what about this robbery or swindle? Which was it?"

"Both times," he yelled. "First he robbed me and then it's a swindle! I want you should arrest him."

"Who?"

"Keptin Duncan! You should ask is he crooked! By him it's a corkscrew straight as a T-square."

"Unload the details," I invited.

"Well, it's last week a big whisper in the fur market who's gotta finest three silver fox? Something special, match set? Everybody asking! Chim Kincaid comes in my place to look. He's scout by Gillis from the Bay. I got lots of fox; nice sets. Not good enough. In comes Paul Benoit, he's scout by Revillion's. Everybody comes in my place. Well, I'll go down to the auction, anyway; maybe I'll get some nice furs cheap, no? Pretty quick I meet Gavin O'Neill, he's scout for Gavin O'Neill, y'unnerstand. 'Well, Jake,' he says, 'gonna cop this prize?' 'It's a business I got,' I says, 'and not a gembling like you. What prize?' 'Didn't you heard?' Gavin says. 'Wilcox got an order for the three finest fox in the market. Must be a perfect set. It's a tip, Jake, they're for Royalty. No price limit. Ten thousand for the set easy. Better shake a leg, huh?' 'Shake it yourself,' I says, 'you ain't a cripple!' 'It's fierce about me,' says Gavin. 'I know of a set of fox that beats anything in the world but I can't touch 'em. The old devil wouldn't sell 'em to me for any price.

And four thousand for me just waiting to grab! Wilcox is a good friend of mine; I could land him sure. Hell, ain't it? So long Jake.' 'Come back here,' I grab him. 'Do you want you should maybe get stepped on by a brewery horses crossing the street and such an information be killed? Who got those furs and why shouldn't he sell them to Wilcox? What does he asking for the set?' 'Six thousand would buy them,' Gavin says. 'He's out of town and doesn't know about Wilcox's offer.' 'Um,' I says, 'I didn't catch the name.' 'Forget it,' says Gavin, 'you're no gambler, Jake.' 'For a four thousand which it's a sure thing, I'd be a gambler once!' 'Two thousand,' says Gavin, 'we go fifty-fifty, Jake. Your money and expenses against my tip!' Hmm! Do I look foolish, Officer?"

"It doesn't matter," I said.

"Believe me you should see what a fox skins this Keptin Duncan he's got it. Strictly high class! And a match set? See my shin? Does it match, one by the other, the whiskers? 'Um, not so bad, Keptin, how much?' 'Eight thousand, Mr. Silverman.' 'Excuse me!' I said. 'It's a long trip by Edmonton. Good day!'"

It was no use trying to stop them when they started to try the case for themselves that way. I said: "So you didn't buy them?"

"I wouldn't buy such a set of foxes like that? Without no argument at all! What you think I am doing three hours by this Keptin Duncan?"

Resting? Everything nice business. Six thousand dollars, tenk you! Sign please the receipt eight thousand. So I can show Gavin O'Neill by his fifty-fifty, y'unnerstand, Officer."

"I don't see it," I objected.

"Ain't it always fifty percent profit the asking price by the fur business? Well then, Gavin, he's asking two thousand oder he'll take one, won't he? Do I look foolish, Officer? And me hiring liver-teams what if I don't get back tomorrow I'll better buy the hosses? And expenses?"

"Then what?" I asked.

"Well; 'Have a little drink from schnapps, Mr. Silverman. That's a good fox set you have bought.' 'Hm! Yes, I guess there wouldn't be anything to touch them in the market.' 'Not in the market,' says Keptin Duncan, 'You've got a good judgment by fur, Mr. Silverman. I want you should pass please, the opinion on something.' Well, all right, what is? Down goes the Irish by the basement; comes up again. 'Look at these, Mr. Silverman. Sometimes I think they're even better than yours what you just bought.'"

"And were they?" I asked.

"You should ask me! Silver foxes and matched? From the two sets you couldn't tell the one by the other.' Hm! 'What you'll giving me for these three, Mr. Silverman?' 'What I'll going to do with them, Keptin? Except I'll got an order by a customer, I wouldn't buy even three, y'unnerstand.' 'Hm, yes. Wilcox's order you got,' he

says. 'Eight thousand for these three, Mr. Silverman.' 'You could keep 'em,' I tell him. 'For another set I wouldn't give you eight hundred even. And Mr. Wilcox he's got his order filled yet, so what?' 'I'll wait an hour, Mr. Silverman.' 'You should wait a year, Keptin, what you'll catch a sucker for eight thousand.' 'I'll wait an hour before I'll telegraph my broker and send a runner to Edmonton with them.' 'So you gotta a broker, Keptin Duncan? That's nice. What's the name, please?' 'Gavin O'Neill, Mr. Silverman. One hour I'm waiting.' So what you gonna do, Officer?"

"What am I going to do? I'm going to have a good laugh the minute you're gone."

"Ha, ha! You laughing, huh? Might you couldn't arrest him it's a crook, being partners with Gavin O'Neill? Ain't it a swindle he should send such a foxes and beat me to Edmonton? And Gavin O'Neill with Wilcox just like that?" He held up two fingers. "What, I'm an old man and such a payroll with expenses! You going sit with laughing I should get stung by two sets skins, which if I don't buy the other one I'm stung already, huh? Is that good business by me?"

"There's nothing I can do about it," I explained. "He has a right to send his furs to Edmonton if he likes. If your man O'Neill worked a fraud you can sue him. But you'd have something to explain too, if you pulled a fake receipt for eight thousand instead of six."

"This Keptin ain't foolish, y'unnerstand; he'll fix that, I bet you. I'll be paying him for eight thousand the other set what he'll gimme a receipt for six. Yi! Then Gavin he'll go fifty-fifty from the cheap set. Two thousand he'll make it for nothing. I should pay liver-teams with eating and sleeping the timster. Such an expenses! You got the time, please?"

I showed him my watch; it was ten minutes of twelve.

"Better I'll go. Well, tank you for the pleasure, Officer. It's a nice pipples you got down here. Yah! Wolfs!"

VII

I forgot to laugh when he had gone, from thinking of the neat picture that he drew of Captain Duncan. A wolf! And it was to meditate schemes like this that he paced back and forth on the narrow porch that Brandy Shannon called a bridge. Waiting, patient as an animal, to get such a combination of furs into his hands. And waiting again till the proper occasion should deliver a victim to his trap. A shrewd, deliberate old scalawag, that one, biding his opportunities and seizing them. Somehow my chances of earning promotion on him seemed uncertain and a long way off. I wondered if I was doing everything humanly possible about my suspicions. Tommy Thomas was a good bet, except for being a mortal liar and mutton-headed. Still I had a good hold on Tommy; enough to make him anxious to please.

Then there was Halliday. I had an uncomfortable moment just then, recalling him and the astonishing progress he'd made at getting close to the Captain. It may have been from the story old Silverman had just poured out, but I felt uneasy about him. Why should the Captain encourage, or even allow the interest of young Halliday to center on him and his affairs? He was making a point of being downright friendly, as Halliday told it. That sounded too good to be true. Was it just

for the sake of keeping Isabella occupied and diverted? In that case he'd have let it go at merely being civil to my young friend. I mistrusted him and then and there I decided to warm up my own relations with Halliday and to keep a closer eye on him. It was in my mind to warn him away from the old Captain's influence if I saw any danger of his being corrupted by the relationship. Except for the apparently genuine interest Isabella was displaying toward him, I'd have done it anyway on the strength of my suspicions of old Duncan. But I had a real admiration for the girl after seeing the spirited way she had put Wallis in his place, so I decided to let things ride for a time.

Two weeks passed before I saw Halliday and Isabella together again. One Sunday morning they came down to the river where the boats were tied, and strings of loaded scows lay waiting. A dozen or two had already gone, drifted lazily downstream on the current, with others to follow after them or ready to be tracked laboriously upstream with their crews. The Company's steamer was loaded and with more scows in tow, was casting off to follow them as far as Grande Island. Besides her own crew, she carried a picked team of river-wise Indians and breeds who would take all the scows through the bad rapids just at the Island.

Tim Wade's boat was ready too, with the last of Wallis' freight going into her side-door as I got there. Wallis had made his trip to Edmonton, and come back the day before. Forehandedly, he had

got most of his stuff hauled up to the Lesser Slave on the winter ice, and stored in a warehouse he had at Saw Ridge. The remainder was this cargo of Tim Wade's first upriver trip of the season. Presently the boat's whistle blew, a long throaty blast that brought delighted grins to the faces of all Malotte's Beavers swarming about the rail. Tim Wade looked out of the window of his pilot house and asked if I could see anything of Wallis. I couldn't and Tim wished to gosh he'd come and not hold them up there any longer. It was going to cramp him right now to make the first wood-yard before his fuel ran out. I suggested that he could put Malotte and his crew ashore with tracking-gear if that happened, and make them line her the rest of the way. But Tim told me very shortly, that she was a steamboat, not a cussed scow. At least, if people wouldn't keep him waiting till his wood was all burned up, making steam for nothing. Did I know if Wallis was really here or not? All he had was the word of that black buck, to hold her till Wallis came. He'd pull out in about another minute, and what was Wallis doing anyway? Coming, I supposed.

I had made a point of talking to Wallis the evening before in Papineau's hotel. When I learned that most of his supplies had gone up the river before the break-up I had a sudden bright idea. I asked him directly if he was the man that had been slipping spring tonic to the Indians along the Lesser Slave in the past. Not that I had any idea it was

him, but I thought I'd ask. He felt it was damn cheeky of me and denied knowing anything about it. I asked about his own supply of medical liquor and he said he'd brought in two gallons which I would find among his stuff at the boat. He had brought three gallons more, he added, which I would not be able to find.

"Most likely it's your Captain friend doing the mischief," Wallis suggested. I admitted that such a possibility had occurred to me. "Certain to be him, now that I think of it," Wallis added. "A poacher, isn't he? Probably uses the liquor as bait for the Indians. Surprised that you'd tolerate it!"

"I don't," I explained. "It's merely a little matter of evidence I want."

"Well, ask him, why don't you? As you did me. The old duffer might unbosom to you and save the trouble."

At that his suggestion was not so much wilder than some I'd had from Headquarters.

Naturally, the two boats going out in addition to a flock of scows, made a good deal of excitement for one Sunday morning. Most everybody in the Landing was down at the river to see them off. Malcolm Fraser was there, watching the last of his worries being loaded onto the remaining scows. Malcolm would be turning human again if there proved to be no shortage in his check-out at the warehouse. Halliday and Isabella Duncan stood under the shade of a young poplar tree and he was drawing maps with the tip of her parasol, tracing

the system of water-ways that empty the Arctic basin. They called me to join them and settle some question of geography.

"We seem to be uncertain about the Peace," Halliday explained. "Does it join the Athabasca just here at the Lake as I have it?"

"No, a little nearer to that horse-track. It flows more directly into the Great Slave, you see."

Then I must correct the positions he'd marked for some of the old forts and trading-posts up and down the rivers. They had portentous names and Halliday knew all of them.

"And where is the Hay River?" Isabella wanted to know. I scratched it in for her.

"The Hay Lakes are about here." I sketched a rough pretzel on the ground and looked directly at her as I mentioned them. Oho! I thought, somebody is interested in the Hay Lakes country. Must have heard about it lately. "There's a trading-post out there," I went on, "one of the few strong, independent places."

"What name has it?" asked Halliday.

"I doubt if it has one," I said. "It's only been there a few years; not old enough for a name. Probably get one now though, Paradise Lost, or something like that." I looked at her as I spoke and I could see the remark had registered. She gave me a swift surprised glance.

Malcolm Fraser came up to call Halliday aside for private conversation, and before anything could be said by Isabella or myself, Wallis came in sight.

He was strolling unhurriedly in spite of Tim Wade's exasperated countenance framed in the window of his pilot house. Louis Papineau followed Wallis with a heavy traveling bag in either hand. Wallis had a right to think that we were there, as much to see him off as for any other reason and I was astonished that he marched straight past without appearing to see us. I even squared round to salute him till I saw that he wasn't going to shift his stare to our direction. Feeling a little embarrassed on Isabella's account, I glanced at her.

"Our impulsive friend seems to have overlooked his manners this morning," I said. "He forgot to speak to us."

"His manner was correct in my case," she answered. "He has not been introduced, you know."

"Why, I thought—" I suppose there are a few times when even the brightest of us overspeak ourselves and have a horrible, foolish sensation right after. I fought this one off as fast as I could. Isabella was watching me a little warily.

"What did you think, Constable Lynch?"

"I thought he—he would have arranged it," I managed to explain. "He seemed very anxious to meet you."

"I can't say as to that. I made the condition that he ask father to introduce us and he failed to do so."

"That's funny," I said. "He has quite a reputation, I believe, for getting what he wants."

"Then perhaps he has changed his mind."

I had my stride again and I looked directly at her for a moment. She was beautiful as the very devil. "How could he?" I asked.

She chose to be pleased with such a heavy-footed compliment but there was a little relief mixed up in the laugh she gave. It was hardly possible that she could have suspected the willow clump of being occupied that night when Wallis proposed to her so off-handedly. None the less, she had been faintly alarmed at my outburst. I realized then that Wallis hadn't been properly introduced to her at all, but had escorted her home with at least her passive consent. Maybe that slap she gave him didn't mean as much as I imagined at the time. Wallis hadn't been perturbed by it. I'd have to think about this.

Halliday came back to us again and the *Northern Star* was hissing steam and making a great splash of water with her paddle wheels as the shore-lines were eased off. We had seen the last of Wallis for the season, and I hoped the last of Malotte forever. Not quite, however. There was one little by-play between Malotte and Louis Papineau yet to be concluded. Malotte had met his lord and master before he reached the boat, and attempted to relieve Louis of the luggage. But Louis stood up to him and with the aid of a hissed French oath or two, made Malotte follow him up the plank behind Wallis and into the boat. The plank had been promptly hauled in and the door shut behind them. Now, with the paddles turning and

the boat already edging away from the bank, Louis slid back the door and balanced himself on the threshold for the jump to land. It wasn't far—six feet at most—and below him enough to make it easy.

Louis always enjoyed making a display of his manly strength and agility, and he acknowledged the spectators by a pleased smirk as he crouched and raised his arms for the jump. He had forgotten Malotte. At the exact instant Louis pressed the trigger, Malotte's foot shot out from behind the doorway, booting him viciously. It raised Louis' elevation but shortened his range so that his jump was used up before he had cleared the water. Malotte's villainous face peered round the edge of the door and he seemed well pleased with the result.

VIII

It was high time I had a talk with Halliday and made a start toward disillusioning him about the Duncans, father and daughter. Isabella would have to be included now. There were lots of pleasanter jobs to tackle but this had to be done. Life was no Christmas pudding and sooner or later he was bound to stumble onto the fact and maybe take a fall or cripple himself. It was my notion to throw out a warning in this case and save him from barking his shins. I'm not nosey as a general thing, and I had already lived long enough to observe the usual fate of the fixer who goes in for tinkering other people's lives. But Gene Halliday was as gentle and sensitive as a setter pup and I felt that he ought to be spared the trampling I could see ahead of him.

People are different. In my own case it would have been a crime for anyone to have tried shielding me from trouble when I was his age. I was hungry for it in any shape or form. And, while I don't like to boast, I can say that a lot of darned good men and women slapped me to a whisper, one way and another, before I was cured. That was the only way for me to learn the virtues of meekness and humility. And while it was fun enough when I was at it, as time went on I could see it wasn't proper medicine for everyone. Not

for Halliday, I felt certain. He wasn't like me; he had imagination, a quality for which I have always entertained a secret respect. It's a tricky proposition though, and the ones that have most of it are not so apt to be blessed with good thick skins and hard bones in their heads. It can lift a man up so astonishingly at times that he can see miles beyond the common range of vision. And it can drop him mighty hard, too.

I'd seen its work in the course of my Police duties; down on the bald prairies among the homesteaders and there on the north side of the world among the trappers and squatters and prospectors that trailed in and out. It was never any trouble to spot them; the imaginative ones had books among their duffle. They had their heads full of great dreams, too; a fine country place to be made from a homestead, a gold-mine or a fortune of some kind, was always plainly visible to their naked eye. I used to envy them then. Later I began to see that they were the first to get their hearts broken, when solitude and desolation had laid hold of them and the infernal elements had added their bit to the strain. And many a one I have tracked down and caught after he had gone to the brush, howling like a wolf. Carried them out too, on a pack horse or strapped in the back of a democrat wagon while they raved about mines of pure gold, mountains of it, or else some perpetual grindstone they had invented. One fellow I remember, had a scheme for making an axe with six blades. He

drew a sketch for me one evening while I was feeding his supper to him with a spoon. It was designed for use with a rope handle, he explained. Swung round and round the operator's head, it would do miracles at swamping off logging roads, revolutionize the lumber industry. I believed him but I wouldn't take off his leg irons when he wanted to demonstrate it with my hand axe.

Imagination is a great thing, and given the proper outlet will no doubt do all the advertising claims for it. But to stand frost and snow, or mosquitoes and mud, with utter loneliness and utter monotony the year round, it takes easy-going men, heavy sleepers and a little on the lazy side. They'll never turn the world upside down it is true. But they are fond enough of eating to be willing to cook for themselves, they sleep warm and they shave and scrub their woolens every month. In summertime, I mean. They eat up a lot of plug tobacco in a year and some of them are careless about their nails and necks. Yet they are the boys to take it calmly if the pack horse tangles his legs and goes down in a muskeg swamp with the grub-stake. They've got no imagination but they keep their matches dry.

Now Halliday wasn't that kind. And he wouldn't get to be in a thousand years of trying. He was sensitive as I have said, and excitable and visionary. More on the spiritual order, if that's what I mean, and less bone and gristle. He didn't even smoke, let alone chew. Somebody had to be

his friend and I felt a kind of left-handed paternity for him that couldn't be explained. It was not like me to be sentimental. I weighed 188 pounds, just as.

Halliday was in his back room reading a book, when I went in to see him. He was generally reading a book; there were rows of them on shelves above his bunk. It was fortunate I'd come in, he said; here was a book he'd just got hold of, a stimulating and inspiring work and I was to remind him to let me read it as soon as he had finished. I said, yes, and what book was it? Halliday recited the title: "Conquest of the great Northwest; being the story of the adventurers of England known as Hudson's Bay Co."

"Sounds heavy!" I remarked.

"Not at all. It's a thrilling account of a great achievement. You'll surely be interested in it."

"Not me," I said. "Any time I want to hear the wind blow from that quarter I go up and start old Malcolm Fraser. He can tell it either way; Malcolm and the Company or the Company and Malcolm. You ought to hear it from him."

Halliday smiled. "What's funny?" I asked.

"It amused me to think of old Mr. Fraser as carrying on the tradition and spirit of those early gentlemen adventurers. It's about like thinking of the whale-backs on the Lakes as fathered by the galleons of the ancient Spanish main. They'd have about as much in common."

"Now what's the matter with old Malcolm?"

Seems to me I heard him mentioned as an offspring of the Governor and Company of Adventurers; heir to several hundred years of tradition and history and what-not. Isn't that what you said about him or was he lying?"

Halliday didn't even blush at admitting it. "It's true, literally, but I find that spiritually he is alien to them. The adventurous zest that led them on, that still lives in the very nature of the business, is gone from him. He no longer responds to it if he ever did."

"But who does any more?" I demanded. This was right to my hand, you see, and I was ready to show him that he was delirious. "Maybe some fellow that's writing a book could get excited over the romance and thrills of trading groceries and ammunition for fur, but who else? Certainly nobody that has to put up with such a blasted country and make a living in it, is going to stay drunk with the excitement of it for very long."

"I think you're mistaken," Halliday answered. "Of course no one is going to make himself ridiculous, but the spirit of those days still lives. I do not find it in Mr. Fraser but it is elsewhere in Athabasca Landing."

"Who's got it then?"

"Captain Duncan for one. He feels the fascination and drama of the fur trade in a way that would surprise you."

"I'm already surprised," I said. "I'd never have shot the Captain for one to let his feelings run

away with him, especially in business. And while we're on that subject, there's a little hint I want to give you, Halliday. And I want you to understand that I have your best interests at heart."

"What is it?"

"Well, just this; don't take this old Captain whole-hog without asking yourself a few questions. I've been here longer than you and I'm more familiar with people out this way. He's tricky! This is confidential of course, but that Captain is a tough proposition; apt to cut corners any time and take advantage of somebody. I've got the details if I want to use them. Now you're the only person here that he'll have anything to do with and there must be a reason for it. You want to keep an eye that he doesn't try to make use of you in some way. Might find yourself involved in something that would injure your position. You're a public official in a way and you couldn't afford that. If old Duncan is showing very much sympathy and appreciation for your notions of drama and adventure in the Great Northwest you want to look out! It's not like him. It's not like him to be agreeable to anyone unless he's figuring to take his scalp. And that harp he's got for adjutant will bear watching too. He's not brainy but he'll do what the Captain tells him. I'm not knocking them, understand! Brandy Shannon wouldn't tell you the truth unless he was certain you'd think he was lying. That's him! Now you mustn't be offended by this—"

"Not at all," he spoke up, "your point of view is very interesting, Constable. And I'm glad to hear it direct from you."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. But I have been given to understand that you felt this way so I was prepared for it."

"Who has been telling you all that?" I demanded.

"Well, Captain Duncan for one. And Mr. Shannon spoke of it too. They feel that your attitude is somewhat prejudiced."

"You listen to me," I ordered. "I don't go around airing my views of people just to exercise my jaw. It was my private, personal opinion I gave you and it was for your own good I did it."

"I understand you perfectly, Constable."

"I doubt it," I said. "Just how do you understand me?"

"There's no use discussing it, really, unless you insist."

"Go on. Tell us all about my prejudices and attitudes."

"You spoke of Captain Duncan possibly trying to make use of me for his own ends."

"Well?"

"Didn't you hope to do something of the kind yourself, when I began going up there?"

"What makes you think I did?" I demanded.

"I supposed you were going up there to see Isabella."

"Perhaps I was—mistaken. You won't be offended, Constable?"

The blamed interview was getting out of hand but I thought I could see light in one direction. "Let's have it straight now," I said. "Did old Duncan and that swamper of his spin a yarn to you about me?"

"Why, no! But they mentioned—I forget how it came up—they felt that you disliked them and stood ready to fasten suspicion on them for anything, er—irregular that might occur. I didn't agree with them though. I thought it was a case of mutual misunderstanding."

"They asked about me then?"

"Not exactly. The Captain was just wondering if you ever questioned me about him. I said you had not, and that I knew you would not stoop to do so."

"Certainly not," I agreed. "Whatever gave him such an idea?"

"I can't imagine, unless it might be his age. The Captain has lived a hardy vigorous life and now he is paying for it of course. He's not so well, really, as he looks, nor as strong as one would think, for a big man."

The hell he wasn't! Could that black whisker and hair be dyed? Yet I had seen him reach out and pick up his daughter at arm's length the day she arrived at the Landing. And she was no infant. "Go on," I urged him.

"Well, this is the way I analyzed it; he's lived

alone so long, except for Mr. Shannon who isn't really companionable, and he's an independent trader. That naturally makes him unpopular with the big companies' men and no doubt they've shown it. From brooding over that in his loneliness and failing health, he has come to suspect everyone of disliking him in his old age. In fact when I suggested that to him he was able to see it. He agreed with me."

"He would," I said. "How old is the Captain?"

"I don't know exactly; a good deal older than he looks, I believe."

"Possibly! But the thing that surprises me, Halliday, is your discussing your friends with anybody. We're friends, aren't we?"

"I hope so," he declared. "Still, you can hardly blame me, I couldn't help it."

"You could though," I insisted. "A man doesn't like to feel that he is being discussed back and forth by people that are unfriendly."

"But I only defended you! And haven't we been doing the same thing about them just now?"

"That's different," I said. "I'm giving you the benefit of my trained observation and I'm in a position to know what I talk about. A man has to know in my business."

It was a thin bluff of course, but the best I could manage at the moment.

"Frankly, Constable, I think it is your Police training that prompts you to take the attitude that you do toward Captain Duncan."

"Right! Only it's not just an attitude."

"I think it is. And I said—I mean I feel sure of it."

"What did you say to him?" I persisted. He had meant to be careful but he had dropped a stitch just there. "As a matter of fact now, didn't old Duncan warn you that I would probably try to pump you about his affairs simply because I'm a Policeman and naturally suspicious of anything I can't understand?"

"He did say something like that, I believe. But I—"

"You agreed with him. And then you told him that his suspicions of me were caused by his loneliness and old age and being an independent trader, and he agreed with you. Didn't he?"

"Yes. But isn't that about the truth of it, Constable?"

"It doesn't matter," I said. The numbskull! It wasn't enough that he explained me to the Captain. Now he was trying to explain me to myself!

I was patient with him though; I started at the beginning and went over it again for his benefit. First I made it clear that I wasn't in the habit of lugging around a head full of suspicions about people in the district; that I had no such attitude toward old Malcolm, for instance, or Tim Wade or the French factor, or even Louis Papineau. It was for his benefit I was giving this advice and not just to be picking on the Duncan. Without going so far as to tell him he was making a fool of himself, I

pressed home the fact that I was in a position to know more about things than he. It was a straight line of talk I fed him, only he wouldn't keep it down. The minute I stopped he opened up.

"Don't think that I don't appreciate this, Constable. I believe your interest is genuine and straightforward. But I can't let you go without making you understand my own ideas about this. I believe that we generally find in people the qualities that we look for. At least that has been my experience. For example, I have thought of you from the first, as being the highest type of Westerner and officer; self-reliant and above petty meannesses and bigotry. Able to take care of yourself and ready to lend a hand to those not so fortunately situated. And your talk to me just now only proves that you are what I thought you to be."

He was a good deal wrong of course. Still, I could bear to hear it, so I let him go on.

"I find it much the same in the others here; the response has been identical. Mr. Wade, the postmaster,—all of them in fact—have been splendid to me. Even Louis Papineau goes out of his way to do little friendly acts. It's because I have looked for friendliness in them, I think."

I didn't tell him that I'd threatened to brain Louis if he ever got noisy to the kid or tried to win money off him.

"It has been so with Captain Duncan," he continued. "Nobody else, you say, has anything to

do with him. But when I went there, expecting to find him a friendly interesting person, I did so. Far beyond my expectations! The Captain has lived a tremendously rich life. Why, the stories he has told me of his life at sea would make a book! All he has seen and felt is kept stored in his mind as I keep my office files. Honestly, I wish you could get to know him better, Constable. He's surely been a help and inspiration to me!"

"In what particular way?" I asked.

"I don't know if I ever mentioned it or not, but I have an ambition to do something else one day. The telegraph service is all right if one is content to follow a routine all one's life. But I regard it more as a stepping-stone in my plans. When I'm familiar with it, and certain other things are settled, I mean to tackle the fur game."

"You'll find it's a pretty tough affair to call a game," I said. "You going trapping?"

"Oh, but it is a game and a very exciting one," he declared. "Captain Duncan has shown me that. He plays it as a game and all the drama that goes to make it, all the pathos and comedy, are meat and drink to him."

"I imagined profit and loss would be his two chief interests," I protested.

"That's because you don't know him. Only last week there was an instance of it; he had three lovely fox-skins, silver fox and very black. He was two years getting them together so that he had a perfectly matched set. We examined them some

time ago in observing the different qualities of furs."

"We?"

"Miss Isabella and myself," Halliday explained.

"Is she taking lessons in the fur business too?"

"She's tremendously interested in it! And she's more certain of quality right now than I am. Knows if it's prime or not before I do, though I am best at identifying the different species."

"Must be interesting classes he holds. But go on about the fox skins."

"They illustrate the Captain's love for beautiful things for their own sake. He got hold of the first one by accident, he's known as a sort of connoisseur of fine skins, I imagine; furs come to him from all manner of places. Anyhow he was so struck with the sheer beauty of it, he told us, that he refused a good offer and determined to try to match up a set. It was difficult enough, he examined dozens of skins before he had two more. And again he had an offer for them, a fair market price for an average set of prime fox, well matched. But he refused. Sometime, he was certain, he would find a buyer who appreciated their extraordinary beauty and would pay enough to justify his pains in matching them. And last week such a man came and paid his price without haggling. Even then, I think the Captain hated to see them go; he wanted to keep them, just for his own pleasure in them."

"How much did he get?" I asked.

"I don't know. Enough, he said. And here's the finest thing about it, Constable, they are to be made up for some royal princess! Could anything be more fitting, after the painstaking care he lavished on them and the patience he used in getting them together? And you tell me it isn't a fascinating game!"

What was the use? I wanted to stand up and tell him it was all wrong; turn his pretty picture of the kind, beauty-loving old Captain around and sketch in the rest of the story. I knew it all right; I had a pal on the divisional staff in Edmonton follow it up and give me the outcome. The broker Wilcox was a third partner of the Captain, apparently, and the whole deal was framed up to sting somebody hard. Silverman was elected when he fell for the talk about Wilcox's order. My pal said Silverman nearly cried when he told it. He had "two sets fox skins now and wasn't that a swindle?" But I couldn't tell all that to Halliday; he wouldn't believe it if I did. He was not looking for any skull and cross-bones on his bottles, and so there wouldn't be any! I didn't know whether to slap him for being dumb, or pick him up on my lap. If I had done either he was sure to have a sweet charitable explanation for it, all ready to start believing. It was time to change the subject.

Halliday had taken a lot of pains in decorating his room, I saw. There was an old bearskin serving as a rug on the floor, probably a gift from the

Duncans, and a table and armchair good enough to have been made by the ingenious Brandy Shannon. There were curtains across his rear window and hanging in front of his clothes in the corner. Wonders can be done with a clean gunnysack. Ripped open and dyed and the ends sewed down, it looks like stuff you'd have to pay money for in a store. It made a home of Halliday's place; he could undress without having to put out his light.

He had found pictures to cover the bare boards on two sides of his room. Cut from illustrated London magazines, most of them were, and hung so that a row of arrogant, vacant faces peered at you whenever you looked. Stars of the moment in the social or matrimonial firmament; thin-faced, long-necked ladies and weedy young men, all trying their best to appear adequate to the labels printed below them. I moved round the room looking them over and returning their haughty stares till I came across one that nearly put my eye out.

"Who's this?" I asked. I was surprised that he should have the thing, at least hung up in plain sight in his bedroom. This one hadn't been cut out of any magazine I ever came across; it was colored and more like a picture than a photograph. A lot of clouds and sky in the background—if you looked there. I didn't; not at first. It was a picture of two women, good-lookers they were, grouped along some kind of an ornamental porch rail or maybe it was an outdoor bath tub. I

couldn't have told then how the left hand figure was dressed, for looking at the one on the right. The only thing she wore was a towel and a cake of soap. At least I thought it was soap.

"Don't you know that?" Halliday was asking.

"No, I don't. And how did you get hold of it?"

"That's a copy of a famous old painting," he explained. "Miss Duncan gave it to me. It's called 'Sacred and Profane Love.'"

It seemed reasonable enough on the second look, though I was a little surprised at Isabella, too. "I wonder which is which, but I guess that's easy to see. Nature is certainly—"

"The nude figure is 'Sacred Love,'" Halliday informed me.

I took my hat and got out of there. I swear I thought he was all mixed and twisted about that as he was about everything else.

IX

One morning there were two little red spots on my forearm. I looked at them in surprise, thinking how the time had gone. And that day I got out the mosquito tent for my bed and overhauled it. There was an empty kerosene can saved for months to make a smudge-pot. Let the little devils buzz and whine; I was going to get my regular sleep.

And that was the summer, with the sun circling overhead and chasing the shade round and round the four sides of my barracks. Good hot sunshine it was, with plentiful showers that sent the grasses shooting up in the clearings and marshy places. Wild pea-vine along the river was waist-high. People took things easy, kept their smudges going and enjoyed the heat and daylight as much as possible. My watch ran down once and it was a week before I troubled to wind it again. Who cared what time it was? It was either dawn or daylight with the sun barely popping into his hole down north and popping right out again. If you went to see a man you were as apt to find him in bed as not, whether it was four in the morning or four in the afternoon. The Indian women in the villages had packed up their ponies and dogs and set out for the little parks and old burnings where saskatoon berries were plentiful. They took it easy,

you bet. Someone would knock down a moose and they would all camp right there till it was eaten up or another one killed in the direction they wanted to go. Louis Papineau's Hotel was empty most of the time except for a few regulars like Halliday and me. You got a meal whenever you went to the kitchen and made enough fuss about it. Many a set of flapjacks I mixed and cooked for myself with Louis asleep in the woodbox and it ten o'clock in the morning.

And almost before anyone was thinking of it, the sun began to slip back south a little more each trip. I met an Indian along the river one day with a half-grown goose he had shot. It had already started to fly a little. Hell, I thought, time to cuss the mosquitoes while I can. They were fierce about then, having multiplied and replenished the earth.

For about a month during the hottest part of the summer I used to go swimming in the Athabasca. There was a place inside of a gravel bar that was practically still water after the river ran down and I swam there every morning. It was cold of course, but no colder than ice water ought to be and I had enough meat on my bones to let me enjoy it. I induced Halliday to come with me once although he protested that he had no bathing suit. He could use mine, I told him, to get started. But when I came out of the brush dressed like September Morn's big brother, he balked. Good Heavens, didn't I imagine people might see me? With half a dozen cabins in plain sight across the

river? I told him not to be so blamed sensitive; that decent people wouldn't stop to rubber at a man washing himself and minding his own business, and who cared a hoot about them that weren't? The cabins across the river were Indian shacks and it was certain there would be no squawks from them. Alex Shields and his wife and her mother's family lived over there along with most any other foot-loose ones that cared to stop. He and his crowd had been chased out of St. Albert's three years before and I was never sure but I should have chased them away from the Landing. Still they had to live somewhere, I supposed.

I explained that to Halliday except I didn't go into particulars about Alex's wife and her sisters. But he only went into the water once, and that was a failure for him as I knew it would be. A man can't enjoy swimming if he insists on wearing an old union suit that gets water-logged in the first two minutes. I started to tear it off him as a joke but he got indignant and climbed out and dressed. That left me to swim alone and I meant to stick to it as long as I could bear the water. Some days I went swimming twice but even so I doubt if it brought my average of baths too high when it was spread over a year.

There was to be a profit for the trouble I took at it however. One morning I wakened early, it was no more than half past four. Somehow, in turning over in my blankets during the night, I had made a rent in the cheese-cloth wall of my bed-

tent. Mosquitoes had found the rent; it was they that had roused me. Having no patience to attempt repairs on the thing before breakfast, I went for a swim. A blanket of heavy white mist hung over the river, hiding the opposite shore, though it was daylight with the sun threatening to show his face any minute. I stood on the high bank watching the mist, and that fact saved me from death by mortification.

Halliday and Isabella came floating into sight in an Indian dugout. I took cover behind some bushes and waited to see what they were up to. He kept the dugout close inshore with his paddle and they drifted across the dead water behind the sunken bar that made my swimming-hole. Just an early morning boat-ride it seemed. Halliday shipped his paddle and leaned forward talking to Isabella, who sat in the bow with her back toward me. It was not possible to hear what he said because of the river noise. His hands moved about in gestures that took in the film of mist beyond them, the overhanging wall of trees, and the red glare of sunrise in the east. It was dead in earnest, whatever he was saying. Isabella paid close attention, too, holding the sides of the dugout with her hands as though to steady it. A pity, I thought, since I was out of sight, not to hear what was being said. He might have been discussing the fur trade, but the pantomime was technically correct for a proposal. A man doesn't usually drop over on his knees and hold out his hands prayerfully when the

conversation is on pelts and skins. That's what Halliday was doing and he had an earnest, hopeful look on his face that couldn't have had anything to do with prices or quality.

Isabella must have offered him some encouragement for he moved to bring himself closer, to take her hand probably, and found the paddle lying athwart the dugout in front of him. It made an awkward interruption to his speech, but Halliday, painstaking soul, must place the paddle carefully behind him, instead of cuffing it into the water altogether as a more impetuous lover would have done. He even turned around to make sure of placing it safely across the stern and at just that moment, Isabella upset the craft.

It is no trick at all to pour yourself out of one of those fool dugouts; shifting your chew of tobacco suddenly will almost do it. And Isabella pulled it off so neatly that I would have sworn it was Halliday's fault if I had not been watching her at the time. She had been holding both sides of the thing and when Halliday turned away she simply lifted one hand shoved down suddenly with the other.

Halliday looked foolish and horrified as he went overboard, the way a man always looks under such circumstances. Not so Isabella! She half rose, let out a mild squeal and did a dive backward over the side of the boat. Arms flung out and long, graceful legs already kicking as she disappeared.

My first impulse naturally, was to lope down

the bank and stand by to rescue them, but I restrained it, fortunately. I was fifteen or twenty feet above them and the water was clear as glass. Something very funny was happening down there. Isabella's dive had carried her to the bottom where she righted herself and turned on her back. Her face was visible to me and her eyes were open looking up as she moved her hands slowly to keep from rising. Except for seeing her so clearly, I should have been alarmed. I remembered thinking the darned girl was as much at home down there as a fish.

Halliday meantime came right up, snorting like a horse and casting terrified glances around for Isabella, the moment he could see. Nothing to be seen but the sinister face of the water and the upturned dugout drifting out of reach! A cluster of bubbles broke on the surface just beside him; I watched them from the moment Isabella blew them out just beneath him. He promptly grabbed his nose and attempted to do a leap out of the water like a trout, to give momentum to his dive. He didn't get down more than his length but Isabella made a quick stroke and shot up into his arms. Her speed was enough to carry them to the surface, which was probably fortunate for both of them. Halliday had his arms around her waist and the novelty of it seemed to occupy him, for he forgot to swim. She reminded him of it as soon as she had a good breath, by starting to sink again. He didn't want any more diving that morning.

Holding her with one arm he began to thrash the stuffing out of the water with the other. You couldn't have called it swimming; it was more as though he meant to climb up on the water and walk ashore. Except for Isabella, whose arms and legs I could see industriously helping, I doubt if he could have towed her a yard.

And what should the girl do, the minute they're on dry land, but wilt right into his arms! Started crying, and sobbing out, my God he'd saved her life, the beautiful liar! She was beautiful, too; hair all straggling down in a black mass across one shoulder and her light summer dress sticking to her as if it had been painted on. I snatched up my clothes and tiptoed along the path a little way and put them on. Then I marched up and popped over the edge of the bank before I pretended to see them.

"What's happened?" I cried, aghast as possible, and staring from them to the drifting dugout. Halliday was too palsied with cold to answer if an explanation had been necessary. They dried their faces with my towel and then I hustled them both to my barracks. An honest jolt of ardent spirits brought a favorable reaction in Isabella but Halliday stayed blue and goose-fleshed and incoherent. It seemed he couldn't get his mind off the horrible tragedy that might have occurred, and he could hardly realize yet that it was past. Isabella insisted he should go home. So after setting out a pail for her to wring her laundry into and giving

her an old civilian overcoat for a dressing robe, I led Halliday to his quarters and put him to bed. Since he was still in a nervous and hysterical condition, I took a flask with me and induced him to drink most of it. He was trying to tell me about his dying thoughts when I left but as there was enough liquor in him to have restored the circulation in a corpse, I hurried back to Isabella.

She opened the door a crack, to ask if she might wear the overcoat home. I said sure, and she came out carrying her clothes in a neat roll under her arm. I walked home with her but we didn't say much. I was busy wondering why on earth she dumped herself and Halliday into the river and then made him think he saved her. There was no answer unless she had it and I hesitated to ask. It was strange too, walking along the road with a nice girl and knowing she had on nothing but my overcoat. Unreal! I felt it. Isabella was quite composed however; possibly everything had gone off satisfactorily. She hummed little tunes and laughed about nothing at all. Twice she stopped to shake out her hair and draw it around in front to see if the water had made it wavy. It had.

There was a turn in the road just before we came in sight of Duncan's post and she stopped when we reached there.

"You needn't go any further, Constable Lynch; I am all right, thanks. And I have your bath towel, by the way. It makes an excellent sarong. I'll return it with the coat. Good-bye."

I stayed watching after her, concealed by the leafy scrub that lined the road. She did not glance back till she reached the door of her home, when she turned to wave gaily with something white that fluttered in her hand. My bath towel. Yet she had no reason to believe I would be there to see.

Malcolm Fraser was still asleep when I rattled the latch of his bedroom door. It was unlocked so I went in and found Malcolm peering out from his mosquito tent.

"Malcolm, what's a sarong?" I demanded.

He kept his eyes on me while he climbed out of bed and found his spectacles and put them on. Then he sat down again and glared; a skinny old man in his rumpled flannel night shirt, one knobby foot covering the other.

"My God!" I said, "have I got to file a bill of particulars and furnish references before I can ask you a question? How was I to know you wanted to sleep all day. I want to know what is a sarong?"

"If I had a gun—" he muttered and stood up. But instead of finishing his threat, he jerked a sheet off his bed and folded it in half. I watched as he drew it around his waist, folding the ends together. Then he rolled the upper edge down over the fold and the thing hung there.

"Oh," I said, "a kind of kilt, eh?"

"If I had a gun," Malcolm repeated, "I would shoot ye! Stormin' a mon's privacy in the dead

of nicht wi' nought but an undershirt hidin' your nakedness."

I discovered that he was right; there was no shirt on me. I wondered if it had been noticed. "An' 'tis nae a kilt, understand, but low heathen garbage," Malcolm went on. "Ut has nae the freedom an' style of a kilt as ye'll note."

"All right," I said, "I was after information, not an argument."

I left then in spite of all he called me for not giving him an explanation. Why couldn't Isabella have said "kilt" in the first place so I would understand?

X

Queer things occurred in my mind during the next few days. I imagined at the time that some heavy thinking was being done, but later I saw it hadn't come to that. Round and round my thoughts went like a horse grazing on a picket rope. First they would dwell on Halliday, and from that to him and Isabella. Then the girl herself; she claimed a good half of the circle of my day dreaming. It was surprising, the number of ways I managed to think of her: Isabella, queening it along the village street with all business suspended while she passed. The first to see her coming would be young Foley, promoted now to stable boss of the stage outfit in tribute to his energy and steadiness. It seemed she could never appear in daytime but he'd be at the front of the stable, broom or curry-comb in hand, gaping frankly at the vision. It was the same all the way up the street. Louis Papineau was always abusive to his Indian woman for an hour after Isabella passed, and even old Malcolm was not above refreshing his years by the sight of her. I often glanced out myself when she'd be going by; Isabella pleasantly aware of all this.

But I had other pictures of her, impressions that seemed personally my own; Isabella drawing fire from the brazen Wallis and then slapping him for

his pains. But laughing afterward. And down at the river after the drowning party, so sleek and vital with the water dripping off her. That image was clearest and the hardest to erase. About there I would find I was thinking about Isabella and myself, strange unlikely fancies such as I hadn't entertained for years. But why not? I'd ask myself. Wasn't I a man? And I would admit that I was. Well then— And off I'd go on another round of speculation.

This lasted more than a week but in the end it was no use. I was Lynch; Halliday was Halliday. And Isabella was—whatever she was. I couldn't decide. But I had missed two meals in that time, a bad sign for me. The overcoat she sent back and I gave it to Tommy Thomas as a present. There was scent of some kind on it. Probably she had sprayed it with perfume, knowing or guessing the effect a whiff of it might have on a man living alone with lots of time on his hands. It kept the elusive suggestion of herself present in my closet as long as it was there.

Tommy Thomas didn't mind; he promptly spread the coat out on the floor and cut off two feet of its tail with his pocketknife. That insured him against any change of mind on my part and altered its style to conform with Indian taste in overcoats. Tommy had nothing of consequence to report concerning the Duncan layout. Annie was fierce to live with since she went there to work. Nothing else. Brandy Shannon sang lots of songs

and sometimes danced, even when nobody was looking at him. I asked about the Captain's health but Tommy didn't know. The Captain walked like hell on the back porch every day and swam in the Athabasca every night. Maybe he was sick, huh? Or crazy? I remembered that after Tommy had gone.

No doubt if I'd have been half as suspicious of things as Halliday imagined, I would have observed his condition sooner. But it was three weeks before I realized he was off his feed. He had been missing a good many meals at Papineau's lately, on account of calling on the Duncan's three times a week instead of twice, as before. It seemed that he had supper with them whenever he called. He missed other meals but I thought there was nothing unusual about that; I'd have passed up lots of them myself if there had been anything else to do. One night we had supper together and he was even more grave and occupied than usual. Several times he stopped chewing and stared blankly at nothing. Like a man discovering a loose filling in his teeth. Something on his mind, I thought. Maybe he'd flunked his examination at night school; got confused between musquash and musk-ox or something of the kind. I sent Louis back for more rice pudding and dismissed the matter from my mind.

My suspicions had been right, for he came to see me the following night. He just had to talk, it seemed, and he didn't know how to begin. It was late—long after midnight—when I woke up and

found he was in my room. I told him to light the smudge and make himself comfortable and what was the matter, anyhow?

"Oh, nothing! Nothing in particular, I guess. I couldn't sleep so I took a long walk up the trail and back. Thought I'd stop on the chance you'd still be awake."

I said I was and what did he want to talk about?

"Not about anything special; just talk, I suppose. Hang it, Constable, I hope you don't mind my leaning on you this way. But in my condition— I don't know that you'll understand! I haven't made many friends out here, close friends I mean, and I find I do need them at times. I've rather counted on you."

"That's right," I told him. "You can count on me any time. Now what about your condition? I notice you haven't been looking too well here lately. What is it?"

Halliday had been prowling up and down the room after he had lit the lamp, a gloomy shape, seen through the cheese-cloth wall of my mosquito-tent. I was a voice. He slumped down in the chair before he answered.

"I'm in love."

Great Snakes, I thought, he's just now found it out! I'd known it all along and probably everyone else did too. But I saw he expected something of me so I shoved my open hand out under the tent toward him.

"Well, well," I gurgled, "let me congratulate you!"

"It's not quite time for that," he objected. "There's been no—no understanding between us yet."

"You mean to say you haven't told her about it?"

"No, I haven't. I can't! I mean how can I decently—? You see it's this way, Constable; I have been tremendously attracted to her from the first, almost. Her eagerness and enthusiasm for everything—you've no idea what a lot of interests we find in common, likes and dislikes, you know."

"Sure," I agreed.

"I had hoped that it might come to something eventually. When I got established, I mean. It may sound presumptuous of me but it wasn't really; I'm ambitious and trying to look ahead as far as I can."

"A man's got to."

"Yes. Well, as I say, I was hopeful of everything from almost the first. And now since this accident she's been—well, just wonderful! I can't tell you! Her trust and gratitude somehow puts everything on me; all responsibility, you know."

"Gratitude for what?" I asked.

"In the first place she pretends it was her fault the boat upset and spilled us. I know it wasn't of course, and she only says that so I won't feel such a clumsy bungler. I did it myself, accidentally."

"Why not believe her if she insists it was her fault?" I suggested. "Let her have it her way. What does it matter?"

"A man can't deceive himself, Constable. I couldn't. At least about a thing like that. Then the other, saving her afterward, makes her regard me so differently right now."

"I didn't know you saved her."

I said that to see if he believed it. He did.

"Anyone would have done the same, of course," he protested. "She swims a little, but the fright and shock seemed to paralyze her till she couldn't even try to swim. I had to dive and bring her up and get her to shore."

I kept still till I felt I could trust myself to speak. "Tell me about it. I didn't know you had to do that."

"I don't remember clearly—confused, I guess, but it seems I found her the first time I dived."

"Well, I don't see anything for her to complain about. It ought to give her a good opinion of you. Lots of girls would have a tender feeling for anybody that pulled them out of a watery grave; especially a single young man of good habits and holding a government job."

"She has," he declared. "I told you, everything has been so different since then. That's what makes my position difficult."

"I don't see it! If that's true, seems to me all you've got to do is go up there and measure her for a ring and tell her to consider herself spoken for. Isn't that all?"

He admitted rather solemnly that it might be just that simple. "Then, hell-a-mile!" I burst out.

"What do you mean by mourning around here when everything is all set? You say you're in love with her and she's willing; that makes it unanimous, doesn't it? If her old man objects, tell him to go somewhere. Lord, boy, if I was in your shoes, and had any ambition to get married, I wouldn't be looking for sympathy. I'd be on my way!"

Halliday stood up. "I was afraid you wouldn't understand. I'm sorry I disturbed you." He moved toward the door, sort of crept toward it like a wounded young creature that meant to go off somewhere alone and be miserable. I couldn't stand it.

"Come back here," I ordered. "Maybe I've jumped to the wrong conclusions. Sit down and make me understand what it is that's griping you." I crawled out from under my tent and sat on the edge of my bed to hear him out.

"I can understand your view of it, Constable. No doubt most men would feel the same as you do. But I can't! For me to ask her to marry me just now would be taking advantage of her gratitude. How can I honestly press my claims under the circumstances? I can't; it's against my code! You can think me a fool if you like, but there it is. I love her too much to do it. But God—how I want her!"

He was up on his feet again flinging about the room like a worm in hot ashes.

"I'm beginning to believe you have it pretty

bad," I said by way of sympathizing with him.

"Ah, don't imagine this is the usual thing that occurs, an infatuation that will burn itself out in time. And it's something deeper than any mere passion; the physical never enters my thoughts. It's— I can't tell you! Something about her, restive and tormented and troubled, that makes me simply hunger to protect her. I'd give my life if I could, to bring her relief and comfort! You don't understand it, I'm afraid, and I can't explain her character exactly. Maybe it's her mixed blood to blame that she's full of whims and fancies; one minute she's happy and delighted and the next she's tragic and depressed. She is a victim of these violent contrasts of temperament and suffers terribly."

He sat down again. "She needs some steadfast understanding soul between herself and all those dreads and misgivings. Someone to give and give of love and—just love! I mean to be that," he went on, more to himself than to me. "Her man! If I can only wait. I've got to wait!"

Nobody could have doubted his sincerity just then, the last words came out like a cry of pain, right from whatever there was inside of him. He had moisture glistening in his eyes too as he got up and went to stand in the door. There didn't seem to be anything handy for me to say. Oh, I could have shot off a smart one or two, I suppose, something flippant and cynical, but I didn't feel like it. Mostly I wanted to swear and I'd have

done so except I knew it would be no use. This kid was my friend; I liked him. Not that I ever thought he had an overload of horse-sense, but he had guts in his own fool way. Nobody else that I knew would have stood by his scruples in a case like that. Then too he had poured out his confidences to me without any bluff or excuse and it was up to me to respect them and do what I could. He needed it.

"Would you like a drink?" I asked.

It's been my experience that a prompt application of some potent liquor is the best first-aid treatment to give in an emergency. And that goes for anything from wet feet to colic in the conscience. Certainly there's been many a poor duck got panicky and jumped himself into the dark blue ultimatum that would never have done so if he could have hung his lip over a piece of glass-ware with something spiteful in it. Now I am not one of those that want to use it in place of water; I couldn't have been, in my business. I have been known to let it alone. But I have gathered up the personal effects of the deceased a good many times after they'd said "What's the use?" once too often. I've seen the stuff they left behind them; everything from ladies' garters to phoney mining stock. And never did I come across a mouthful of honest drinking-whisky in the residue of a suicide's estate. There may be a moral in that—I'm not sure.

Halliday didn't want to drink.

"How does old Dunc stand in this matter?" I asked.

The Captain Duncan was favorable, Halliday thought. "I've not discussed it openly with him as yet but I have good reason to think he'd be pleased. From things he's said."

Just offhand I didn't believe it. I asked Halliday for particulars.

"Why . . . he's mentioned details of his business in a way that implied as much. He spoke about the time when he would be wanting to retire and leave it in the hands of someone who felt as he did about it. In other ways too, referring to his books, or book, rather."

"Has the Captain got a book?"

Halliday almost managed to smile. "Of course, stacks of them. It was one in particular I meant, where he has kept a record of all his transactions. His log book, he calls it."

I had heard about that one.

"If all this is true," I said, "it means clear sledding for you. And with her father on your side, it's a cinch! I've known of couples getting married when neither one really wanted the other and in spite of parental opposition. It looks to me as if you might get your own consent to go ahead and file a claim on her anyway. Couldn't you possibly overcome these objections of yours?"

No, he couldn't! Such was his code and I surely understood that he was honest about it. It was the way people were built, he guessed; a man made his

choice of what he could or couldn't do and he was bound to stand or fall by that. Her father's encouragement only made it harder for him. But he'd have to wait—just wait—till he could be sure that her love was not affected or colored in the least by gratitude to him for saving her life. That was merely an accident and he had a right to want it forgotten first. His own character and life and ambition were the gifts he had to offer along with his profound and understanding love. And for these only, he wanted to be loved in return. He would die of shame, he declared, should he claim his advantage now and her feelings toward him ever suffer a change. No matter how long afterward! Too proud-spirited to show it, she would endure in silence. But he'd know! Know he had cheated and betrayed her in his selfishness. Despoliation it would amount to; on a level with seduction and such unspeakable things. No! It was going to be hard—God knew how terribly he wanted her—but he must wait and hope for the growth of that more perfect relationship between them. And he loved her enough to do it.

I told myself that there, but for the tenderness of hell, went Lynch! Here was undiluted courage too; I saw him tremble, almost, at the thought of her. Maybe it was not the kind of blood-and-thunder courage that makes a man ready to fight lions and tigers, but it was just as gamy in its way. Moral courage! That's what it was. And I seemed to remember reading an opinion once, that

"he that hangeth onto himself is greater than he that taketh a swing at a big guy." Something to that effect anyway. Ten thousand mosquitoes buzzed round my ears and put test-holes into the back of my neck while I sat there and admired him. Then I began to do some practical worrying on his account.

"I'm with you to the bitter end," I said. "But for the love of Pat Murphy, don't imagine that everybody else is going to be."

What did I mean? "Look out for competition," I warned. "Vital statistics give this province about twenty-five or thirty eligible males for every female. It's certain that somebody is going to be left out. Every time a woman gets married, two dozen poor devils must tear up their tickets. And nobody likes to do that without a struggle, you know."

"You mean somebody may try to supplant me in her affections? It would be natural of course, she is so—so—"

"That's just it," I said.

"But I shan't allow myself to be worried about that, Constable. I haven't a proprietary feeling toward her; I want to hold her bound fast by my love, but like this—" He held out his open hand, palm up. I saw pictures of sweet childhood feeding doves.

"Still I wouldn't let the general public get such an idea. Claim-jumping has been known in this country and there may be some ornery hound plot-

ting against you right now. And you couldn't blame him." The fact was I had toyed with the idea myself, but I didn't see any good reason for saying so.

"I presume you are referring to that fellow Wallis?" Halliday asked.

I hadn't thought of him but I said yes. "And he is just arrogant and pig-headed enough to give you trouble," I added. "Stranger things have happened."

Halliday gave me a pleasant smile. "You're forgetting certain things, aren't you, Constable? In the first place, the man's a sort of renegade white, isn't he, living right among the Indians? You could hardly imagine Miss Duncan ignoring the implication in that."

I understood what he was getting at. Renegade white man; it meant chiefly one thing in that country. And yet—I had personally seen Wallis laying the gad to big Malotte on mere suspicion. Anyway, who knew what a girl would choose to believe or why?

"For another thing," Halliday was saying, "there is little likelihood of his having the chance to interest Miss Duncan in himself. He has not been introduced, you must remember!"

I slapped the back of my neck and my hand came away with spats of blood on it.

XI

It was only natural Halliday should find that the easier part was defending his ideals to me. The rest of his undertaking was more like being cooked over a slow fire. His imagination would see to that. I don't know how it is with noble-minded people generally; whether they feel compensated for the trouble they take or not. Halliday was surely paying a stiff price for his lofty moral purpose; taking long solitary walks at night after visiting Isabella, and coming in wet to the hips from dew on the grass and pea vine. Other nights he read till the small hours, pored over books that couldn't possibly have meant anything to him at such a time. Except red eyes next day. But neither the walks nor the books brought much relief from the fever of natural masculine ingredients that are part of every man. An uncivilized part.

I knew something of what he was going through and did my best to distract his mind. But no, he wouldn't go duck-hunting with me, and they were fairly swarming around the sloughs, getting ready to fly back south again. I offered to take him to where we were certain to get a moose, not two miles from the Landing, but he didn't care for that sort of thing.

"What you ought to do," I told him, "is jump

the stage in the morning and go out to Edmonton for a couple of days. Tell them you're sick and have to go for treatment. Spend a month's pay and have yourself a good bust. It's not Montreal of course, but it's a good little town for the purpose."

But he wouldn't hear of it. He didn't want the burden of remorse and shame added to his load. His conscience was clean, thank God, and he meant to keep it so.

Well, the wild ducks went south just as they always did and autumn came moving in. That's one blessed thing about the seasons down there; when they start to change, they change. First a hint of frost and then white frost regularly every night. The leaves of the poplar and willow scrub and the birch all turn from green to golden brown almost at once and in a few days they are on the ground. The pea vine withers to hard dry twists of stems; the rushes and swamp-grass are dull and brown. The sap goes out of everything but people and dogs and horses. They begin to snort or howl or put on flesh, whichever is most characteristic of which. Out in the wilderness of brush, old Mr. Bear is sniffing around for a dry cave along some creek-bank, or a snug hole in a tangle of windfall timber in which to do his heavy winter sleeping. And the big snow-shoe rabbit, cheerful dunce, is changing into his winter coat, making ready to caper forth and tempt the meat-lovers of the wilds. One day the frost fails to melt out of the ground;

the sun has lost his power. Another summer tallied off.

I met Tim Wade on the street and asked him how the river was. It could go dry for all he cared. The *Star* was tied up last night. He was going out to Edmonton in the morning.

"And say, Lynch, how about bringing in a little stuff? My brother's two girls are comin' back with me for a visit and the Missus wants to have a dance for 'em. My permit's all used up for this year. Steamboatin' and all, uses up a lot of liquor. Seems to. Be all right, you think?"

That was a fair sample of Tim, springing a question like that at me. And yet he made good money running his old boat, apparently. I never understood it.

"The only way you could do it," I explained, "would be to keep any smart Mounted Policeman from learning of it. And invite me to the dance," I added.

"Oh, sure! Figured on you coming. Be all right then, huh?"

"So long as I don't know anything about it," I said. Tim turned that over two or three times before he grinned.

Oh, things began to take on an active air about the Landing; business came back from hell, where Malcolm insisted it went every summer. The squaws and kids had long since returned from their berry picking and drying and the men that had gone down with the scows came stringing back, a

good batch on the Company's boat, every trip from down river. They had money now, or credit which was even better, and there would be gift dances in the village at night. Everybody would get a gift. Sometimes white men, transients usually, would get slightly askew from drinking of Louis Papineau's inexhaustible two-gallon permit, and go to the Indian dances. Seeking gifts. Once in a while I would be obliged to collar one and put his feet on the straight and narrow again.

Then there would be tea-dances. These were peaceable affairs enough unless some gay buck should get hold of whisky and try diluting the tea with it. I have dusted many pairs of Indian pants with a riding-crop on that account. It's as good a cure as any. Big Annie used to be a large and popular figure at those Indian dances but it seemed she had practically turned white since she went to work for Isabella Duncan. It caused talk more or less. I even heard white men complain about it. And now Tim Wade's wife was threatening to pull off the premier social event of our brilliant winter season. She gave me a lengthy invitation to it, coming to my barracks in her carpet-slippers and a simple cooking-and-dish-washing frock to do so.

"We don't want only the nicest people," she explained. "Them that know how to behave themselves. You know how it is when us folks try to have a good time, just among ourselves. There's always a lot of rough-necks tryin' to horn in. Es-

pecially if Tim should happen to bring a permit back with him!"

I knew how it was.

"I told Tim right out that if I caught a single teamster or anybody that wasn't invited, on the floor or in my kitchen, why, he had to throw him out, no matter how big he was. I want the girls to have a good time."

I promised to do what I could to help them and to see that Tim's permit wasn't drunk up by a lot of purple-nosed teamsters.

"I wouldn't dance with one of 'em if he asked me," she declared. I said neither would I, and who-all was coming?

"All the business people and the young folks. I guess we'll have a good crowd if only there's ladies enough. I declare I hate to go to a dance when there's only four or five women. The way they keep you on your feet all the time, and they's always men dancing together. Dancin' tough too, like as not! Some people don't seem to know when ladies is present!"

She wanted to know if I couldn't bring a girl. "Whom could I bring? There's only one girl here and she'll be spoken for long ago."

"You mean Isabella Duncan of course. She's comin'. At least I asked her; if she don't think she's too good to come. I wouldn't, only Tim started swearin' round."

There was more of it, all about how she had no use for anybody that thought theirselves better

than somebody else. Isabella didn't need to think she was so much! Who knew anything about her before she came there? She'd heard some things if she wanted to tell 'em and she hoped to goodness that nice Mr. Halliday didn't get mixed up with her. Maybe some people could be fooled by fine feathers, but there was one that wasn't. "Anyway, you wait till you see Tim's nieces!"

"They're the real goods, eh?"

"Well, she'll learn she ain't the only one the boys'll notice. Milly, she's the oldest one, an' already she's as good as engaged to a business man in Edmonton. They only moved there last winter. She wears his ring anyhow and he's got a lumber yard. Tim's brother is a C. P. R. conductor. Well, I'll have to go now; everything's to do and I ain't invited hardly a soul yet."

I accepted her invitation.

XII

By no amount of exaggeration could Tim Wade have been called a popular character. He attended too strictly to his own business to earn even such an empty reputation, but by taking it easy and saying nothing, he had come to have lots of friends. There was ample evidence of this when I got to his house on the night of the dance. They stood packed into the kitchen, the men at least, where Tim was presiding over his end of the entertainment, a hearty substantial bunch of citizens, most of them freshly shaved. Old Malcolm Fraser was chatting amiably with the factor of the French concern, as though he had never uttered a curse on them in his life. Louis Papineau was rushing back and forth from the kitchen to the living room with perspiration already glistening on his face. Louis was due to furnish most of the music with his accordion; all of it if Ed Patten should happen to break a fiddle-string. That rated Louis as master of ceremonies or better. He had already taken off his coat.

New arrivals formed a line that led from the outside door to the kitchen table where Tim stood. Malcolm Fraser kept an eye out for repeaters, being moved by habit to husband the liquid cheer as much as possible.

"Wie geht's, Tim?" I asked when my turn came.

Tim's face looked as though it had been boiled and he had his mustache cut back.

"Throw it into you, Lynch, and let it do the rest."

Already there were many light and happy souls right there in the kitchen. I looked into the living room where the dancing was to be; young Foley was in there with the ladies, running back and forth and sliding to show how slick the floor was. His social standing was considerably improved by the promotion to stable-boss, and his new yellow shoes with buttons looked prosperous. He kept wondering why we didn't start. Mrs. Tim let out a high squawk at sight of me.

"Oh, there's Lynch! Come here, Lynch." And when I crossed to her she breathlessly made me acquainted with the two nieces. "And look out for him, girls! You know what Mounties are. And he's the awfulest one I ever saw!"

I could never understand why an old hen wants to act giddy when there's girls around. "My goodness, that's a new uniform, too, ain't it? It sure is swell! Sets off a man's figger, don't you think?" she asked the nieces. "I wish Tim would wear something besides overalls and jumper on the boat."

She went right on, mentioning this, that and the other, and hailing her guests at the same time. "Oh, there's Julius! Come here, Julius."

Julius was Julian Guimard, the fat young as-

sistant at the French post. He blushed and came forward.

Isabella was not in sight and the nieces had everything their own way. Not for long, however. Isabella swept in presently and put a stop to their monopoly of male admiration. They were pleasant enough to look upon, those nieces of Tim's, and not too densely ignorant of the fact. But for pure class, Isabella simply began where they left off. Coming in out of the cold, with the color in her cheeks, and her eyes throwing a thousand candle-power apiece, she was enough to break strong men's hearts, just the sight of her. Tim's wife introduced her to the nieces, with a look that said, "This is the one I told you about."

But it was all lost on Isabella. She shook off her long fur coat as if it was just an old rag anyway and probably hadn't cost more than a thousand or so. The bedroom of the house was the ladies' dressing room and I saw her go in and sling the coat indifferently across the bed. And what her coat hadn't done to put the competition to looking down their noses, was accomplished by her dress. It was daring. I don't mean there was any more or less of it than was customary, but somehow it plainly said, "Oh, well!" to every other woman present. Just a plain, straight black affair of some soft stuff, it might have been velvet, cut wide in the neck but not low, with the corners fastened above her shoulders. Possibly it was her bare white arms and neck against the black of it that gave the

effect of assurance. Either that or the way it fitted her; as a liquid fits a tall thin glass.

Louis Papineau was in his corner drawing the first preliminary moans out of his wind calliope and Ed Patten twisted and thumbed gingerly on a weak fiddle-string. Louis sang out, "Grab de partnair for de first dance! She's gonna be a valse." Halliday fought his way through the door in time to claim Isabella, young Foley took a running slide and connected with one of the nieces; the fat Julian proffered his arm to the other. "Come on," I said to Tim's wife, "let's trot this heat together."

It got away with every indication of being the best affair of the kind ever pulled off in the Landing up to that time. Nine women was a clear fifty percent increase over the usual number available and four of them at least were able to keep going without visible effort. Tim's wife was a doubtful fifth, good for a couple of fast hours as a usual thing, but not so willing after that. She was up on the bit tonight, however, right with the music and sometimes even a little ahead of it.

Dancing was somewhat different in those days; a double meaning had not yet been invented for everything said or done. It was unrestrained enough but most of that was taken out in good noisy gusto. A husky man dancing then expected to work up a moderate perspiration and a perfect lady could count on having her life and limbs endangered several times during the course of an

evening. More activity was displayed and less anatomy; hips were just hips.

It became clear at the end of the first dance that more ventilation was required. Under the orders of Tim's wife I went into the bedroom and pried up a window. Young Foley, she directed to whittle another cake of laundry soap over the floor to improve its surface. Standing-room was at a premium in the kitchen when I returned to it, the area of greatest density seeming to be in the neighborhood of Tim and his table. "Wie geht's, Tim?" I said.

There were certain well established rules of procedure that a gentleman was supposed to recognize at an affair of that kind. For one thing, it was not considered good form to dance twice in succession; not with the house crammed with men waiting their turn. Further, active young bucks were not supposed to center their attentions on the younger, and lighter, of the ladies present. An old one and then a young one—that was counted as displaying the proper knowledge of etiquette. At this dance there were four of each class with Tim's wife to be counted on either side you chose. She was on the draft-horse side, naturally, but with a pony's ambitions. I was able-bodied enough to want to dance all the time, but being accustomed to discipline I observed the unwritten rules. I used my head though; whenever Louis announced a square dance or quadrille, I led out one of the heavyweights. These dances had rest periods and

I knew I'd need them with the sled overloaded and the runners rusty.

But from being so polite and having bad luck once in trying to get out of the kitchen in time, it was well into the evening before I could claim Isabella. Louis Papineau had visited the kitchen just before and now he was favoring us with a slow, sentimental waltz, timed just right for conversation.

"Well," I said. "How does it seem to enter competition again?" She was afraid she didn't understand me, so I explained that it was the presence of Tim's attractive nieces I meant. She laughed.

"Oh, that! It would be no trouble at all discounting that if my old friends weren't so fickle." There was a glance that went with this. "I counted especially on you. Mr. Halliday told me about your new uniform and I wore this dress purposely for it. Don't you think we look rather stunning? The brilliant scarlet and this black together? And the gold edging on your breeches? And your jack-boots? Isn't it a shame that we're not in a great lighted ballroom where more people could admire the picture?"

"And remark on her masses of raven hair," I took up the line. "And her lovely long white arms? And her—her—"

"I was just coming to us," she broke in.

We had a good time together, laughing and talking and just letting our feet take care of the danc-

ing. She danced exactly as anyone would have known from seeing her. Anyone with bat-sense about such things, I mean. Actually it seemed to me I was simply holding her comfortable in my arms while my feet and legs were away off somewhere attending to their own business. My mind too, was among those absent. I was living in several centuries at once; from remote forgotten ages past on into the farthest future. I had always lived and would never die; there was no Lynch, a stolid creature of habit and routine, but a strange giant composed of scores of beings that thrilled and welled inside of him. This was no low-walled pen of logs wherein we danced but a palace set on floating clouds. And there just passing me was not the wife of Timothy Wade, an unsprightly, squawish person as I had thought of her, but some heroically beautiful soul. One of the lesser gods no doubt, borne tranquilly through space on waves of music and beating time with her wings.

I was wrong as hell of course, and I came back to earth with an awful bump. Several things appeared to be happening at once; Isabella was saying something, Tim Wade's wife was giving me an accusing look from across the room, and the music had stopped. Ed Patten had definitely busted a fiddle-string. Couples stood about the room murmuring polite sympathy; young Foley raised a titter by suggesting horse-hair as a substitute string. I asked Isabella what she had said.

"I said, where have you been?"

It's funny how a man's mind works at times, as though he had nothing to do with it. I wanted to answer her but first I must wonder if anything had shown in my face; if that was the reason for Mrs. Tim's severe expression? With fearful labor I decided it wasn't that, but the fact that I appeared to be having a more enjoyable time with Isabella than with the nieces. Hell, I thought, why don't I answer her? But first I had to dwell solemnly on whether or not she had missed me while I was gone. I was rattled, you see. But I made a quick come-back for a man of my age and weight.

"Where have I been?" I repeated. "I have been wondering how you liked living in Athabasca Landing."

There was no telling about that girl. She was entitled to roast me to a turn. But instead she looked up at me, a brief glance that examined me carefully, found I was lying to her and generously chose to allow it. Then she glanced down and I could see rather than hear her sigh.

"It is not different, my living here. I am very happy or I am sad! It will always be so, I think. But I will not be bored!" She glanced up at this and for the moment was a fierce young thing, challenging me with her eyes. "Tell me," she went on, "when you were my age—it can't have been so long ago—did the thought of being bored and—and futile simply appall you?"

My answer sounded heavy and thick, like good advice. "At your age I used to be worried terribly

about such things. They don't seem so important now. Habit, I guess; you get used to it."

"I know," she answered. "My mother told me it would be that way. She died so gleefully, I guess—knowing she had missed it. I was only ten but I can remember."

It was a strange mood we were in to be having such a conversation just there. Tim's wife and Luther Bradbury, the harness-maker, were ganged up with the nieces and their partners, all talking at once. Apparently we were waiting for the unexpended portion of that dance to be delivered. Young Foley stood on one foot with the other resting against the log wall behind him. He looked at Isabella and talked much too loudly to Bob Nichols' young wife about a certain Baldy-horse he drove as leader when he was skinning on the north end. She was a bright little Scottie, Bob's wife, but her speech sounded just the way an Airedale looks. Bob was Malcolm's assistant and he translated most of her brogue. Ed Patten's wife had suddenly remembered where to find extra fiddle-strings at their house and Ed had hurried out to get them. Her feat of memory brought congratulations from the waiting couples. "I could just see 'em all at once, in the second drawer of the sewin'-machine. Wasn't that funny?"

I glanced down at Isabella; she was still lost in some vague unhappiness, standing impassively and with eyes blank under their dark level brows. Unaccountably I wanted to say something that would

reach out across the loneliness that shut her in, and let her know I understood; that I had felt and suffered too, and had my moments of despair. Mine was the identical hunger that Halliday had tried to express on the night he visited me. But realizing this brought me sharply to understand that in my case it wasn't true. Not actually. It was some kind of unconscious flattery that she had induced in me. Yet for the moment I had felt it honestly, and having the words at hand, would have said them. In that brief interval I understood that all men indeed are liars. Some wise young woman, it must have been, who first discovered that. But were we, I wondered? Weren't our worthiest moments sometimes farthest away from the facts? I didn't know. I kept on staring down at her hands and I was aware of actually feeling the vital living warmth of her person standing close beside me. I was aware too, that I was being certain kinds of a fool and that I'd better wake up and say something before I made myself conspicuous. The unlovely face of Malcolm Fraser appeared before my eyes and Isabella threw off her pensiveness as if it were an old garment.

"I do hope you've come to engage a dance with me," she told him gaily. He had that, Malcolm admitted and there was a very special favor he wanted to ask if only the Constable Lynch would excuse him.

"Sure!" I stepped back from them and watched her face as Malcolm talked. The changes of ex-

pression that shaped and moved it were like the fluttering pages of a book, too fast to read. Malcolm's request was inaudible to me but after a quick, amused glance around the room, she refused him. But not flatly enough to satisfy his Scottish persistence; he summoned Tim Wade's wife to aid and abet him. Together they overruled her; in fact she had appeared half willing before. Now she called me and asked if I would find Brandy Shannon in the kitchen and send him to her. I hadn't known that Brandy was there but I found him with Tim Wade at the table. He was inclined to doubt my message at first and went only after making threats about what he would do if it proved a shenanigan of any kind. For some reason I had no desire to argue with him; I wanted to stop alone in the crowd for a minute or two and think about myself. "Wie geht's, Lynch?" It was Tim Wade holding something toward me. I shook my head. "Hell with it, Tim," I said, not realizing till afterward how deeply I had been affected.

I got the minute or two alone that I wanted but if any thinking was done I didn't remember it. From the other room came the sound of Louis Papineau warming up his "corjun" again. Running over some soft, moving rhythm that would be great for dancing, I thought, if anyone knew a dance for it. Probably Louis was putting on a solo while waiting for Ed Patten. His oily hide was full of music for a fact, and here was a chance to

show off with no interference from the fiddle or the dancers. What was it he was playing?

There was a stir in the crowd of men standing round the doorway and several pushed ahead into the living room, where the dance was being held. I heard the sound of feet stamping regularly and fingers snapping in time to Louis' music. Someone at the door turned back to say, "Hey, com'ere," in a heavy whisper. Twenty odd men thereupon sought to pass through the door at one time. Under pressure from behind, the foremost ones were crowded on till all of them had entered and ranged themselves around the sides of the room. Tim Wade and I brought up the rear and stood in the doorway. Isabella and Brandy Shannon were doing a dance.

It was none of the jigs or reels or flings that are apt to break out at such times among Irish or Scottish people. This dance was something alien as palm trees in that hard cold land. Something that was part of the astonishing music Louis Papineau was drawing out of his accordion; softly, he was almost tender about it at first, and then rising by stages to a whirling fury. Abruptly it would stop! They posed like statues for the interval, then swept on with the music again, dancing, not together so much as at each other. Heels tapping the floor and fingers snapping the time, they pursued, enticed and eluded each other in turn.

There may have been a meaning to this dance

that we did not understand; some story that unfolded piece-meal between those sudden stops. There stood old Malcolm Fraser looking and nodding his bald head wisely as they whirled and stamped and poised. Malcolm, I thought, would know all about it; he had lived "down under" in his youth and anyway he was nearly as wise as God. It would have been him that dressed Brandy Shannon for his part; a bright handkerchief round his head and somebody's long knitted muffler tied at his waist. When he whirled and snapped his thick fingers above his head, the tasselled ends of this knitted thing stood out bravely in the air.

Probably Brandy Shannon was perfect in his part, I saw but little of him. To me a dummy would have meant as much, someone for Isabella to tempt and tease with her eyes and her bright arms and the sway of her gracious body. For I saw her to be another person than the girl I had so confidently held in my thoughts a little while before. She was living some moment of her own, openly like a secret paraded before our eyes. Perhaps she had wholly forgotten the row of blankish staring faces framed round the wall and was dancing for herself; herself and the bursts of music and something that Brandy Shannon vaguely represented. Yet I could almost doubt it. To me it was as if she said to them, "Hah! You think I am this thing or that, do you? Then see! I am this! Or this! Or I am none of these but quite another." And her head would toss and her black eyes flash

and the skirts swirl round her feet like a rush of black water. And sometimes those skirts that rustled and twisted and swayed, grew confused and belated and a delectable length of stocking would be there for any who happened to see.

I looked at Halliday standing on the opposite side of the room. His face was strained with his effort to understand. Probably they all were embarrassed underneath, just from thinking how embarrassed they'd be at trying to do such a thing. I get embarrassed myself when anyone recites "with feeling." Sometime before, a late arrival had crowded up behind me and hung his chin over my shoulder. "Gad!" was breathed into my ear. The dance went faster and faster. I wondered how it would stop.

It was Brandy Shannon that ended it, or at least the fault was his. From the first there had been something comic in the sight of him; his leathery, ugly face was never made to look haughty or entreating though he had managed up to then by keeping a horribly solemn expression fastened on it. My guess was that Isabella hadn't noticed him for several minutes and couldn't bear it when at last she did. At any rate as he capered toward her, rattling his feet like a billy-goat in hobbles, and with his monstrous eyebrows raised in the effort of looking arch, the sight was too much for her. She broke into a shout of helpless laughter and ran into the bedroom.

Just before Malcolm led off with the cheering,

"Gad!" was breathed into my ear again. I turned round to look and it was Wallis!

"You here?" I exclaimed. He said, "Certainly not," without even glancing at me.

The crowd of men poured back into the kitchen, still echoing their comments on the performance. These were favorable without exception and Louis Papineau, coming last with his arm around the neck of Brandy Shannon, kept saying, "By C'ris', hein?" Tim Wade's wife made the only doubtful remark I heard and that was not surprising coming from her. She was speaking to a niece, the one that was nearly engaged to a lumber-dealer in Edmonton.

"Oh, I don't know!" I overheard her say. "It was damn unrefined, if you ask me!" But nobody did.

XIII

I had lost sight of Wallis as the crowd poured back into the kitchen and when I was about to look for him old Malcolm Fraser must hold me up to explain that he was the only one present who had gumption enough to think of asking Isabella to dance. By gripping the front of my tunic he kept me from finding Wallis just then and when I did see him it was too late. Ed Patten had reappeared with a new fiddle-string fitted and Louis Papineau had refreshed himself and gone back to the other room. Before I could tear myself free of Malcolm they were playing the opening bars of the waltz again and dancing was about to start. I pushed my way to the door but Wallis was ahead of me. He crossed to the bedroom and met Isabella just as she came out. Whether he even asked her for the dance or not I couldn't determine. Probably not, being Wallis. But he put his arm around her and took her hand in spite of the surprised and half-indignant look she gave him. The next I knew they were dancing.

By rights it was my dance he was so blandly finishing and I was entitled to reach out and pluck him when they came past. But then, I thought, it wouldn't do for me to set a bad example by committing any rough-house at Tim's dance. Wallis would likely object and maybe require to be cuffed

in order to make it stick. That would be out of keeping with my position. Being a pillar of propriety and order can be very irksome at times, to a man that takes real pleasure in a good fight.

There was no denying he could dance. In a lazy flat-footed way of course and seeming not to pay the least attention to anything but Isabella. I watched them around several times; his eyes never left her face nor did he once stop talking. Whatever it was he had to say, it was right from the shoulder. No jerky odds and ends of speech, but the honest forthright effort of a man to say all there was to be said on some subject. Even his eyes showed some expression for once as he kept them fastened on her face. Isabella did not reply or return his devouring attention, though a good deal of color was showing in her cheeks. I couldn't make out if she was indignant or secretly pleased. No telling. Halliday was dancing with Bob Nichols' wife. It would do him good, I thought, to see what was going on. When a man talks as earnestly as that to a girl, it's either about her or himself. And both subjects could be dangerous where Halliday's hopes were concerned. I went outside to smoke and think about it.

Smoking was easy, merely a matter of filling my pipe and lighting it. But I found I had too many impressions to sort over to think very freely. The night was sharp and chill outside, and above the milky upper sky were brilliant stars. They all appeared to be shivering slightly in their places as I looked up at them. Through the uncurtained

window I could see them dancing; Halliday painfully trying to understand the chatter of Bob Nichols' wife and Wallis, with his eyes still on Isabella, navigating perfectly by some kind of second sight. The music was improved from out there too. It had a richer sweeter tone when strained from the noise of moving feet and the infernal rasping of young Foley's corduroy pants. I decided to walk up and down and remember Isabella as she danced with Brandy Shannon.

"Ah, Lynch! Been looking everywhere for you!"

The music had stopped and Wallis had come out at the back door. He did not wait for me to recognize him but went on talking. "Should have thought you'd be shining on the social side tonight. Standing guard through the silent watches, eh? Bit hampering this noble Police tradition, isn't it?"

"When did you get in?" I asked him.

"Only just at dark this evening. Look, Lynch; about this native, Thomas, you mentioned last spring. Know whom I mean?"

For the moment I didn't.

"Thomas Thomas, I think you said. Would he have a middle name now?"

"Oh," I said, "Tommy Thomas. I don't know if he has one or not. Why?"

"Be odd if he had and it was Thomas, wouldn't it?"

I wondered when he was going to talk sense. "What about him?"

"Let's tramp up and down, shan't we?" Wallis

suggested. "Stimulates circulation and improves the mind."

We walked a little way along the path in front of Tim's house and stopped to turn. Wallis took a cigarette from his pocket and used up two matches lighting it. We strolled back again.

"Been thinking about this Thomas creature all summer," Wallis continued. "What's he to you anyway, Lynch? A sort of informer or agent? Odd jobs for old Duncan and keeps you advised, is that it?"

I did not answer; he seemed to know enough as it was. With something of a shock I realized that I hadn't seen Tommy Thomas or thought of Captain Duncan for a week. Ice already forming on the river too! In another two weeks snow would be falling.

"Well, what about him?" I demanded.

"Only this," Wallis replied, "he's a feeble reed! Don't lean on him too heavily if you're meaning to take this old Captain prisoner. Not competent, the breed isn't; let you down badly some time when you're counting on him. Thought you ought to know it."

I stopped. We had walked past the end of Tim's house again. Wallis absently struck another match and put it to his cigarette that was already lighted.

"And when did you come by all this low-down on Tommy Thomas?" I enquired.

"Just now. This evening, I mean. Came down the river in a dugout; three paddles and myself.

Ticklish getting ashore too, with the ice along the banks. Shouldn't advise you to try it. Too heavy!"

"I won't," I said. "But go on."

"Passed by the Duncan post and saw the old brigand himself on his rear stoop. Beaming at us through field glasses. I waved and he popped out of sight at once. Then, making a landing down here, Malotte observed a skulker in the brush just by. Spying on us. In plain sight he was too; I could almost see him myself."

He stopped then and lit another cigarette with two more matches. Someone was standing across the street in front of the postoffice, listening to the music, probably, and smoking. I saw the flame of a match as he relighted too. Wallis appeared to think he had made his case.

"What has all that got to do with Tommy?"

"It was him watching us, don't you see. Let himself be surprised at it too."

"I'll bet it wasn't him at all," I said. "He's too slick for anything of the kind."

"Oh, but it was though," Wallis insisted. "Malotte hid under the edge of the bank till he could surround the beggar and make him captive. Took him fair by the neck. It was him right enough; trust Malotte to recall a face of any kind. Seems the Captain was curious about the nature of my business."

"It is out of the ordinary for you to be coming in at this time of the year," I said. "Not that it

concerns the Captain, of course, but what are your reasons for coming?"

It was really none of my business either and I expected he'd make an offensive answer. But he didn't. He said, "Batteries!"

"Yes? What do you mean?"

"Just that," he insisted. "Flash-lamp batteries! Electric torch, you know."

"So you have one of those things?"

"Of course. Wouldn't be without it. Splendid for flashing in people's eyes at night. Click-click! On, off! Mystifies the beggars no end."

"And you forgot to get batteries last spring?"

"Always forget something," he declared. "Fatal weakness of mine. No memory!"

I didn't believe him. He had remembered my remark about Tommy Thomas since the spring before.

"I am punishing myself for it though," he went on. "Making this trip myself as punishment."

I knew he was a liar then. He could have sent an Indian out in half the time. I looked up at the stars and wondered what he had really wanted to see me about. The dancing had stopped again and the man who had been listening across the street, moved on. An Indian, I thought. His footsteps made no sound on the frozen ground.

"Believe I'll be turning in now," Wallis announced. "Past my bedtime and the stage goes infernally early in the morning. About your agent

Thomas; free to use your own discretion of course. I only mentioned it."

"What did you do with him?"

"Imagine he's across the river yet," Wallis answered. "My lads are camped over there and Malotte would want a chat with him. Don't worry though, he'll come back whole by morning. Good night then."

He pranced off toward Papineau's hotel humming to himself, and I noticed for the first time that he carried no stick. Why had the Captain Duncan sent Tommy to spy on him? Lord, here was more thinking to be done! Better go home and get at it while I was clear-headed and awake. The dance was over for me at least. There would be no pleasure left in it.

Tim Wade and his wife thought it wasn't like me to weaken and the night still so young, but I made my excuses and went home. I had been the rounds, danced with all of them and played no favorites. Now it was time to leave off fraternizing with the civilian population and give some attention to being a Mounted Policeman. Stripes and choice detachments weren't distributed on a basis of personal popularity or social accomplishments. In fact, they seemed oftener to go to the most left-handed members of the force. I must get busy and overcome my genial personality or I should be losing my turn. And the first thing was to get some sleep so I would be keen on the job tomorrow. My conscience wanted to disturb

me for not having worried more over Captain Duncan's next move, but I expected to sleep that off. I was no feverish young recruit holding my first detachment. But no sooner had I got myself in that half-sleeping state where thoughts come and go peaceably than somebody banged on my door. It was Tim Wade.

"Get up, Lynch, and come over quick!"

"Who's fighting?" I was out of bed and pulling on fatigue dress as a matter of habit. Tim should have used more discretion in putting out his refreshments, I thought. Trouble with amateur bartenders, they couldn't judge the progress of a few drinks. For a moment I considered buckling on the old blasting-iron but changed my mind. It would look foolish to make a display of arms over nothing worse than a fight and anyway I could get in on it more naturally if I went barehanded. Bolting out of the door I nearly crippled Tim Wade who was waiting outside for me.

"Ain't no fight," he shouted. I stopped and came back to him.

"Hell! You might have said so at first. What is wrong?"

"That Duncan girl; somebody's stole her fur coat! Looks like it anyhow. It's gone out of the bedroom where she put it, and they don't anybody know where it is."

We went to his house but before going inside I had him get a lantern and we looked for tracks under the bedroom window. I remembered open-

ing the window myself earlier in the evening and seeing Isabella's gorgeous coat lying across the bed. There was nothing to be seen outside, several amateur detectives having rushed round there to look for tracks as soon as she reported it gone. They scuffed up the frozen ground fully as much as a herd of cattle would have done and they left a thousand burnt matches scattered around.

Everybody was chattering when we went in the kitchen, but they quieted promptly and looked at me as though expecting I would go into a trance and locate the thief right among them. I did wrinkle up my brows a little as a concession to them; it would never do to let them see how pleased I was at the prospect of a little action. The facts were simple enough after I had discounted all the suspicions that were offered gratis by those present. In five minutes I could have found out just who each one was jealous of and never had trusted much anyway. Nobody ever saw so many mysterious-looking people crowded into one small room. Confidential tips were being traded at even value all round the place. Brandy Shannon dragged me aside to warn me in a tense whisper that I'd find that low Sassenach, Wallis, at the bottom of it certain. I told him to shut up. In fact I told them all to shut up and go home. If anyone had more than a buzzing in his head he could tell me tomorrow.

I found Isabella sitting in a chair in the living room holding a reception. People crowded round

to sympathize and look at her. Tim's wife was terribly distressed. She told me to look at the position it put her in; having a guest robbed right in her own house! She felt real horrible about it and whatever would Miss Duncan think of her now? I shooed everybody away and asked Isabella to tell me what she knew.

"But I know so little about it," she complained. "Several people have hinted that they were certain who did it, but they won't say. Why can't you make them tell, so you can recover my coat? Father will be furious if it's not found."

"It's not so simple as just asking them," I said. "Most of them are probably talking to hear their heads roar. What do you think? Anybody that you suspect?"

How could she suspect anyone? She had nothing but friends among these people so far as she knew. The coat was there when she went into the bedroom after the dance with Brandy Shannon and just now it was gone. The window was open; perhaps someone had climbed in and taken it. I understood it was a very valuable coat, didn't I? A gift from her father?

Everybody in Athabasca Landing had gaped at that coat some time or other. It was made of marten skins; very dark and very prime skins. Malcolm had explained its value to me once before. It seemed the only difference between it and sable was that these skins had been taken in the wrong country. As raw skins they would be Canadian

marten. Made into a coat they were sable. He admitted that nobody could tell the difference in the very finest skins. The value, he said, was scandalous. Isabella's coat had been one of the town's attractions, it and the girl herself. And now it was stolen, apparently, from right under everybody's nose. Especially from right under my own nose; that was the rawest part of it.

Halliday was standing round with a drawn, sad look on his face, as if there had been a death in the family. At the first opportunity he got me aside.

"I don't know what you think about it, Constable, but I'd like to tell you what I think. I feel responsible in a way, you know."

"Go ahead," I told him. "It won't cost anything. Who is your goat?"

"I have been thinking about that bounder Wallis," he admitted. "You saw, didn't you, how he forced his attentions on Miss Duncan?"

"I saw them dancing together, yes."

"And he'd never been introduced to her, though of course she wouldn't care to make a scene by refusing to dance. She thought naturally, that he'd been invited by the Wades, but I find he wasn't at all. Mrs. Wade said so. He was exerting himself all through the dance to make an impression on Miss Duncan and she refused to talk with him. I—I couldn't help noticing it."

"Well," I said, "and so you think he did it?"

"Why, that might be a motive, you see! He left right after, piqued by his failure, and he might

have done it then. I'm only suggesting it of course. I don't know what method you work on, but it's a good rule, I understand, to determine the motives as a means of identifying a criminal. Isn't it?"

It may have been a good theory for all I knew but my training had been generally along the line of picking out the likeliest prospect in a case like this and then camping on his trail till I got the evidence. If I could prove who did it the motive would be merely interesting to me. I sent Halliday and the girl home to break the news to father. Then I went to my barracks so I could arrange it all in my mind and try to figure out what a really competent Policeman ought to do next.

There were several improbable angles to it. In the first place, nobody but a fool would steal a coat like that with the idea of cashing it. The thing would be as hard to sell as a second-hand tombstone. Even ripped apart the skins would look guilty; the stitching on the edges to tell the story and if that were clipped off, the shear marks would show. Some fence or crooked furrier might be able to alter it and get it off his hands, but there were only four or five places in western Canada to market it. And by tomorrow Headquarters in Edmonton would have a description and beat them to it. Meantime I could see who left the Landing in the next few days and what they carried. That was a simple matter. Too simple, in fact, for any-

one but a fool to overlook. Question, who was the fool? Now I was getting down to it!

I checked off everybody that attended the dance. Lots of ordinary simps among them but nobody wild enough to take such a chance. Next I canvassed the rest of the town's white population. Only a few of those; the priest and the nuns of the mission, the Anglican Missionary and his wife, Captain Duncan and a few such odds and ends of population. Not an eligible among them. Indians and breeds then? Not likely, I thought. Where could an Indian take such a coat to get rid of it? Indians like those living around the Landing, had good sense; they'd know there wasn't a chance. Moreover, between the old days when the factors governed them and later with the Mounties setting a good example, the fear of God was pretty firmly ingrained in them.

Oh, they'd rob traplines and get drunk when possible and forget who was married to who; things like that. But only among themselves. They had no morals, but strictly speaking they didn't need any. An Indian might steal a pair of socks or a plug of tobacco because he could use them. But no Indian had use for such a coat, knowing he'd get hell for taking it and maybe catch a long stop in the big stone cabin at Fort Saskatchewan. You worked when you went there; worked hard every day for blankets and grub and sometimes a little smoking tobacco. Oh, yes, you

did! A man with a carbine made you work. And every one of those men with a carbine stayed mad all the time; they'd sooner kick you in the pants than not. You'd see!

The only trouble with my line of reasoning was that it circled on me. Elimination had always proved a sound method theretofore but this time it broke down. By eliminating all the whites and all of the Indians I was practically proving that coat hadn't been stolen. And that was admitted at the start. I could foresee headaches in this case. Now what was Halliday's mail-order detective scheme? Fix on the motive and then find somebody that fitted it? Something like that. And the answer was supposed to be the guilty party. Spite work, Halliday suggested, though I knew the idea was inspired in him by the sight of Wallis dancing with Isabella.

I turned that over in my mind; Wallis stealing the coat to get even with her? Next! To pay off her father, then? "Rubbish!" I told myself, he was in love with the girl, wasn't he? Certainly I had heard him proposing to her myself. And moreover the coat was there just before Isabella danced with Wallis and I was with him after that till he went home to bed. He had been very cheerful, for him. And anyway he wouldn't have done it. Malotte then? Sure, when Malotte was across the river entertaining Tommy Thomas! So Wallis had said and I could check up on it when I saw Tommy.

Three hours of such concentration netted me exactly as much as I started with: the girl's coat, worth anywhere from a thousand dollars up was stolen, practically off her back and practically while I was looking at it. Everybody in this confounded place knew all about it and was openly expecting me to perform a miracle within the next twenty-four hours. And the Lord knows I was sick of mysteries. Why couldn't it have been a fight? I wondered who would get the detachment if I fell down on this deal.

Even Louis Papineau had a tip to offer me. I went down to the hotel just at daylight thinking to rustle a quart or so of good strong tea and some breakfast for myself. Ordinarily the cook-stove would have been cold and no one awake at this time, but I found Louis warming himself in the kitchen and already two-thirds dressed.

"What she say, Lynch?" he greeted me. "You catchin' dat coat, no?"

"Never mind the coat; get me some breakfast!"

"I gettin' back m'self," he declared. "You know who mak' de t'ief?"

"Who?" I asked.

"Malotte, dat's who! Nobody gonna mak' de crooked lak what he does!"

"Rats!" I said. "Put on some tea. Malotte knows better than to pinch a thing like that. You're just sore on Malotte; he was camped across the river last night."

But Louis said no. When he came home from

the dance, Malotte was standing outside of Wallis' window talking to him. Louis had slipped into the kitchen and tried to find his carving knife but the dam-fool woman had washed everything and put it away. He took an arm-load of stove wood and crept around to the back but Malotte had gone. Sure he stole the coat! "Me I gettin' back," Louis promised. "T'ink I'm gonna let dat lousy breed mak' t'ief when 'm makin' music at a dance wit' my cor'jun? Hein? I feexin' good! Pretty soon tak' two, tree big drink an' get my hax! Go cross de Athabasc' an' chop dat breed for cor'-wood size. Kickin' me dat time w'en I'm gonna jump off de boat, huh? Maybe I don't swim, dat dam' paddle-w'eel gonna catch me, den w'at? You see; I get de coat pretty soon. I tak'n one drink already!"

So Malotte had been in the village last night? Talking with his proprietor through the window. I'd put it up to Wallis on that basis. After stopping to finish my breakfast and threatening Papineau with sudden death if he made even a little move toward disturbing the peace, I went to Wallis' room. He got up and lighted his lamp when I came in. Then he sat on the bed in his pajamas and yawned and wanted to know what in blazes I was after.

"The answer to some questions," I told him, "about last night."

"And what about it?" he yawned.

"Miss Duncan lost a very valuable fur coat at

the dance. Stolen by way of the bedroom window apparently. Perhaps Louis has told you about it."

"Not Papineau."

"You knew of it though?"

"Heard rumors," he admitted and sighed. "Malotte was here at the window after I went to bed; he mentioned it."

"Yes," I said. "And how did he know it was stolen, at that time?"

Wallis looked directly at me. "He's a sharpish beggar, cunning as they come. Probably overheard the alarm being sounded and made it all out by watching you through the windows. Not impossible, eh?"

"Maybe not. But what was Malotte doing over here? You told me he was camped across the river and it's not an easy matter to cross with the shore ice as it is now. Especially alone. What was he after?"

Wallis jumped to his feet. "By gad! I never thought of it; forgot to ask him really. Presume I'd know however." He clutched the top of a bedpost and scowled. "Cane the hide off him for that! Been warned, too! He's incorrigible, really," Wallis explained. "Dare say he was prowling the villages after—er—romance, understand."

I understood better than he imagined. With Tommy Thomas more or less a prisoner, I thought I knew where Malotte's prowling would lead him.

"About this coat now," I insisted. "Could he have stolen it?"

"Not a chance," Wallis declared. "Malotte has his—uh, peccadilloes, but he's no thief. Be as sensible to accuse me of it."

"Malotte was around last night," I insisted. "His reputation is only fair with me. I'll have to see him."

"But here, Lynch, didn't I say it would be as brainy to suspect me?"

"And that's no answer either," I told him flatly.

Wallis sat up very straight and stared at me.

"I see!" he exclaimed. "And you do suspect me, eh?"

"So far as I am concerned you are a possibility. Either you or somebody else took the coat," I explained. "The only person that I know positively didn't do it, is myself. That's the basis I'm working on."

"I shall have to trouble you to amend that," Wallis announced. He got to his feet and squared off calmly as you please, but his blue eyes were fairly spitting fire. Apparently he was about to uncork one. I liked him at that moment, more than I ever had before. "Take it easy," I cautioned him. "I've got twenty pounds on you and I don't cry easy. In a small room like this somebody is bound to get skinned up. That's my official attitude about the matter though and it sticks." I took off my hat and tossed it aside. "Still," I offered, "if you feel you've been insulted beyond repair, fly at it. I'd as lief as not."

It didn't come off. Wallis studied me for a few

seconds and the blaze in his eyes died down. "Official attitude, eh? Dare say you're obliged to take that stand. I find it annoying, though."

"So do I. And I'm the boy that's got to get the blame thing back. You don't need to worry unless you stole it. What baggage you carrying?"

He pointed to a bag standing open on the floor and said:

"That."

"So long," I said, but Wallis was already sheathing his pajamas.

XIV

For once there was no trouble about finding Tommy Thomas. I went down to the river after the stage had pulled out for Edmonton, and there was Tommy just landing from a dugout. Two of Wallis' Beavers had charge of the job and they handled Tommy as though he were something precious. I walked out to the edge of the shore ice and asked them where Malotte was. They regarded me and my uniform with friendly interest and finally one of them shrugged. I turned to Tommy and he shrugged.

"Cut it out," I told him. "Is Malotte over there in camp?"

"No more," Tommy answered. "He gone somewhere long ago. No lie, Mr. Lynch; you go see."

This was news! I took Tommy back to the barracks to question him. By rights he was entitled to feel a little wild over the high-handed way he had been treated. But he didn't; he seemed rather proud of the adventure. His story was that the Captain had sent Annie home to tell him to go down-town and spy on Wallis when he came in sight the evening before. Well, it was none of his business why the Captain wanted to know everything, so he done it. Only he didn't have a chance to see much; Malotte grabbed him and took him

across the river. But that was all right—Malotte was not so awful damn smart. Not so smart as Tommy Thomas, sure.

"Did he come back across the river?"

"Two times."

"Alone?"

"I guess so. Them two Beavers they say I gotta camp with them."

"What time did he cross the first trip?"

Tommy didn't know. They could hear the fiddle and Louis' accordion; it was after the dancing started that Malotte left, and yes, by gosh, it was after it stopped that he came back. He didn't bring anything.

"Then what did he do?"

"Just cuss," Tommy said. Cussed in Beaver and Cree and white and French and one other kind. Cussed fierce and swore he was going to cut off Tommy's ears for sure. But did I think Tommy was afraid of Malotte? Oh, no! He knew that Mr. Lynch was a friend of his and would shoot Malotte with his gun and put him in jail if he got smart. Wasn't that right?

"Certainly," I said. "But what was he cussing about?"

Tommy gave me a wise grin and reached into his pocket. He pulled out an old rusty key the size of my little finger and his grin got wider as he looked at it. Piece at a time I got to the reason. He had a lock that took that key; the lock was on a door and the door was the one to his cabin. The

only door it had. There was a window, yes. With glass. But Annie was too big to crawl out of that window, sure. And nobody very big was going to crawl in, either. Didn't I think maybe Tommy Thomas was a pretty smart guy all right?

I couldn't deny it. It seemed Tommy had a rush of brains to the head when Annie came home to tell him that Wallis was in town. He put two and two together and made a lot out of it. If Wallis was here, Malotte was here. He jumped out of the door and locked Annie inside! It was a fine thick door and he had traded a pup for that lock and key.

"When did Malotte leave the last time?" I asked.

Tommy said right away. As soon as he got done cussing and saying he was going to drown Tommy. He put a bundle into his pack-sack and took the rest of a bannock that Tommy hadn't finished eating and some tea and left. One of the Beavers took him across and brought the dugout back.

I inquired particularly about the package Malotte took away with him; if he was sure Malotte hadn't brought it when he returned from this side. Tommy didn't hardly think so. Still, he was pretty sleepy and Malotte was cussing so much he couldn't be for sure about that. It was quite a package; bigger than it was heavy.

I asked Tommy: "Did you know that somebody stole Miss Duncan's coat at the dance last night?"

He looked at me with his eyes opened wide. Then he shrugged. It was too bad! Still, the

Captain wouldn't care now whether Tommy had done as he was told last night or not. He'd have something else to think about. Did I know there were two cigar butts drying up on that shelf? I gave them to him. They were no good but he asked for them.

"Hadn't you better get away now and let Annie loose?"

Tommy didn't think so; his rifle was inside with Annie. Maybe I had better go let her out and just say that Tommy was in jail. He could stay right there with me where it was safe. If anybody came he could easily hide in the other room or under the bed. He could get some sleep that way and if I should want him to do anything, why, he would be there to do it. Somebody would feed his dogs sure, and hadn't he always told me everything I wanted to know? He was a very good friend of mine.

I rode up and liberated Annie, telling her a suitable story to account for my having a key, and for Tommy's absence. Annie was very sullen and skeptical. "I'll killum next time," she threatened. I took the padlock and key away with me so there would be no next time.

Athabasca Landing was rousing to another day as I rode back to it; building its cooking fires, getting its breakfast and feeding its livestock. The air was cold and very clear, and still, now the Indian dogs had finished their morning howl, with the red sun peering over the spruce beyond and

curls of thin blue smoke ascending from stove-pipe chimneys. A brand new day, nothing at all like yesterday. And as soon as breakfast could be swallowed, the rugged sterling souls would begin rushing back and forth to each other's houses, gossiping over the great mystery. By night-fall Isabella's coat would be appraised as worth either ten thousand or else as merely imitation dyed rabbit-skin, depending upon who was telling it. And the rumors and suspicions and the knowing hints! Good reputations wouldn't be worth fifteen cents on the dollar for a few days now, with Lynch himself under a cloud till he found the answer. And Malotte away to God knows where with a significant parcel in his pack-sack.

Tim Wade was the first caller. I was writing a wire to Headquarters when I saw him coming, and chased Tommy Thomas out of sight under my bunk.

"Gosh, Lynch, I hope you get whoever done it! Seems like I ain't heard nothing else all night. I'd sooner had anything happen but that! I only hope Captain Duncan don't get sore at me. How could I help it?"

"You couldn't," I said. "If the old duffer says anything, send him to me. Don't lose any sleep over what he thinks, Tim!"

"Oh, I don't know, Lynch! The old Captain's all right so far's I'm concerned." Tim got this out with a good deal of spirit for him.

"Is he a friend of yours?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know's he'd say so," Tim answered modestly. "Done better by me though than a lot that calls theirselves friends and all." I remembered hearing that Tim wouldn't have a word said against the Captain.

"Tell me about it," I said. "It might help."

"Nothin' to tell. Only when I put my boat on the river, 'fore you come here, she wasn't boilered heavy enough. Put me in the hell of a pinch with a good freight contract on my hands. Couldn't buck the current with her. Not to do any good! The people I got the boiler off'n hollering for their money at the same time. Know what the Captain done?"

I made signs that I didn't.

"Come down one day and asked me all about it. Wrote a check for what I owed and the difference on a good boiler. Never said ten words either! God, I like people that ain't always goin' on!"

"Did he take a mortgage on your boat?" I imagined I could see what the Captain had in mind at the time; a nice river boat of his own.

"Didn't take nothing," Tim replied. "I went up there when I had her runnin' again and signed in his book."

"What book?"

"A book he's got there. Puts all his papers right onto the book, seems like. Wrote my name on a fresh page and I.O.U. and the amount. I signed it."

"Are you square with him yet?"

"Long ago. I got a receipt and he marked it paid in the book."

"Ever do him any favors, Tim? In a business way?"

"Not a thing," Tim answered. "How do you mean?"

"I was wondering if you ever hauled anything for him on your boat?"

"Never hauled a pound either way. People don't like him but it's got nothing to do with me."

This was another slant on the Captain. If he had done this for Tim out of the goodness of his heart, so much in his favor.

"About this coat, Tim; who do you think lifted the fool thing?"

Gosh, he didn't know! There was talk going round but he didn't believe it. I wanted to know who was talking about who?

"Talkin' about that fellow Wallis, some of 'em are. At least Halliday was. Don't seem like he'd do it, though, not to me."

"Why not, Tim?"

"I don't know—he's—well, a kind of a gentleman, ain't he? What would he want to do it for?"

I hadn't figured that out either.

Tim went back to his house and I got on with the message I was writing to headquarters. Halliday and Captain Duncan passed along the opposite side of the street. They reminded me of a barge and a tug-boat, Halliday walking a little sideways and talking up at the Captain, all whiskers and

dignity. They stepped into the postoffice and presently the Captain reappeared and set out toward home. It was the first time I had seen him for weeks and he looked anything but decrepit, stepping along as brisk and erect as a Police recruit. Halliday popped out of the door in a few minutes and hurried across to my place. He had an air of suppressed information about him, indicating that I was to hear something that would enlighten me immensely.

"I was right," he announced. "About the idea I put to you last night. That fellow has plenty of other motives for stealing the coat, besides the ones I mentioned."

"I suppose you are talking about Wallis?" I said.

"Certainly! Captain Duncan has established that! At least he has suggested the probability of it. You see there was a difficulty of some kind between them last spring. But perhaps you didn't hear of it. It seems the Captain had bought some furs from an Indian during the winter. And when this Wallis came out, he called on him, claiming that he had advanced supplies to the Indian and should have got the furs. Naturally Captain Duncan invited him to produce the Indian or some proof of his claim. He couldn't and finally he got so abusive and insolent the Captain ordered him off the place. He says the man made threats at the time! That rather settles the question of a motive, doesn't it?"

"It might," I admitted. "If it was all true."

"But—! Why, I've practically given you his words to me!"

Halliday was surprised at me, and hurt. I reached into a drawer of my table and took out the envelope containing the strands of the Captain's beard that Wallis had given me.

"I warned you against believing all you heard, and I'm warning you again. See these? Know what they are?"

He looked at the long black hairs in my hand and flushed. When he spoke his voice was shocked as though it was a desecration he beheld. I put them away again.

"Where did you get those, Constable?"

"I'm not saying! They were still warm though, when I got them. Just remember what I told you; there's always more to be learned about a thing. And why didn't the Captain come directly to me with his story? Afraid I might ask him some questions, I guess."

My mysterious display of the Captain's whiskers had impressed Halliday for the moment, but my question brought him back to familiar grounds. Explaining! That young man could have explained the devil to the satisfaction of the Pope, if he had happened to feel a friendly interest in old Nick. He smiled at me.

"I think I made that clear to you before. It's simply that neither of you understand the other. He doubted if you would give any credit to a suggestion from him; might even refuse to consider

it on that account. I told him not to be absurd! I knew of course, that your personal feelings would not be allowed to interfere with the discharge of your duty. I told him so."

"He's afraid he won't get action on this, is he?"

"I showed him the fallacy of that. You'd make an even greater effort in the matter. I know you would."

"Why?"

"To prove that he's wrong of course! Your pride would compel you to."

Halliday was about half smart in some ways, at that. He'd stepped right on the truth then, whether he really understood me or not.

"There's another thing," he was saying. "About the reward; he insisted on it against my advice. It's stuck up in the postoffice now and he asked me to wire your Headquarters and advise them of it too. Two hundred and fifty, it is."

The old skipper was working fast! Not twelve hours had gone by and he was all ready to put me on the run. Half the population would drop everything else and start detecting. And when the Inspector heard of it he'd get ratty from thinking it was all due to my general incompetence and be down on me like the wolf on the fold. There followed one of those moments when I wondered what on earth had induced me to get myself into such a job. Only a moment, however. I wasn't actually ready to run. I was hopeful of finding the precious coat. And if I did, a nice little re-

ward wouldn't insult me. Then, with that out of the way, I could turn on the old Captain, I hoped, and get the goods on him for running liquor. I was in a very hopeful mood just then. Halliday took my telegram with orders to rush it.

"Surely!" he agreed. "Anything that will help to catch the thief. It would be curious, wouldn't it, if I had been instrumental in doing it?"

"It would be fatal," I told him. "Why, if you had anything to do with its recovery, you'd be ruined for life. Have just that much more of her gratitude to live down."

He laughed, understanding that as one of my jokes.

Tommy Thomas crawled out from under the bed to spit cigar juice into my fire.

"Well, Tommy, you ought to be a good detective by now. Who stole the blasted coat?"

Tommy meditated for a full minute before he answered.

"I guess Captain Duncan stealin' hisself, huh?"

I told him to get back under the bed if that was the best he could do.

XV

The next few days proved to my own satisfaction at least that there was nothing in the old saying that two heads are better than one. Nor even two dozen. The offer of a reward of two hundred and fifty dollars for information leading to the recovery of the coat, with or without identification of the guilty party, proved inflammatory reading matter to the local inhabitants. Men dropped in at the postoffice to read it for themselves. Immediately they would hurry out to confirm or dispose of their surplus suspicions. It was all good for my business; somebody might turn up something.

The thing got to be like a game with the usual few trying to cheat the rules. They began to proposition me: "Say, if I give you a tip or two and anything comes of it, would I split with you, huh?" Julian Guimard had seven names he was willing to pass over on a forty-sixty split, me taking the big end for making the search. Knowing how Julian's mind worked, I turned it down. Four of those names would have been Malcolm and his gang, and Wallis and Halliday another two. Either Brandy Shannon or myself would have been the seventh guess. Young Foley wanted to know if I cared to make a business deal with him. I said yes, if it meant he was to mind his own business

and let me mind mine. But that wasn't what he meant. What would I do for him if he put me next to something he'd been thinking?

"You couldn't," I said.

He bet he could—listen to this; some Indian got away with it. Now what about it?

I told him I'd think it over; if the thief turned out to be more than a half-breed, I'd probably arrest him, Foley, as an accessory after the fact. Meantime he'd better stick to his shovel and broom if he meant to get anywhere in life.

Some of them got lippy when I ridiculed their tips, insinuating that I was jealous of outside help. I stopped that though, by threatening to tell the objects of their suspicion what they had said. I've noticed that when the average man throws mud, it's likely to be at somebody he couldn't lick. Three Swedes, strangers that had come in to cut cordwood for Tim Wade, heard about it and offered to make a house-to-house search of the Landing, every building in it, Indian or white, if I'd deputize them and be satisfied with a third of the reward. Theirs was about the most sensible scheme that was put forward.

On the third day after the dance, I got a wire back from Headquarters. They had found Malotte as well as Wallis and there was nothing in the baggage or effects of either to justify detaining them. I was to guess again and advise if further co-operation was desired. Naturally it disgusted me. Great balls of mud, I asked myself, what

could a man do with that kind of support behind him? Co-operation! The chances were that gang of square-pushers on Headquarters' Staff, hadn't even found Malotte till after he got rid of the package he carried. What would they know about a foxy breed like him? I vowed then and there that if ever I made a staff sergeant-major's ticket, which was the berth I had in mind, there'd be some real snappy Police work done around Headquarters, or a lot of elegant dummies would soon find out what the Far North looked like! Here I'd fairly chased a crook into their hands with the goods still on him, and they muffed it. Well, let them! I would show up all the stronger for turning the deal alone.

I met Malcolm next day. I said: "What's your secret opinion? I'll go any way you say on the reward. Who stole the girl's coat?"

"Ye're a bright young man, Constable, and nae doot ye'll go far. Aye, but 'twill be in the wrong direction, likely. Yon prize-money is safe enough. 'Twill never be claimed."

XVI

Wallis would have been less than human if he hadn't wanted to rub it in on me a little when he came back through the Landing. He was not really nasty though; merely declaring that I had been thick-headed in reporting my suspicion of him and Malotte to Headquarters. Obtuse, he called it. I asked him point-blank what Malotte had carried in his pack-sack when he left on the night of the dance. Nothing incriminating, he insisted. And he added that he wouldn't tell me—I needed something to occupy me so that I wouldn't despair. Over my condition. I told him my condition was satisfactory to me and he said that was the pity of it. And about my buccaneer friend Duncan; had I got hold of the evidence I wanted against him? I hadn't? Naturally! It appeared he'd have to put a stop to it himself. He owed the Duncan a squashing in any case and it was the patent duty of every civilized white man to protect the Indians from their own weaknesses. Didn't I realize that? Aside from its being illegal where was my manhood; letting such an outrageous practise flourish right under my nose? I told him to dry up or write to the London *Times* about it, if he just had to air his opinions.

"I shan't do either," he insisted. "Point is,

you're getting nowhere and I mean to exert myself in the matter."

I was a little sore by that time. "Go ahead! The exercise will be good for you anyway. You'll not accomplish anything but I'll try to be grateful just the same."

Oh, I wasn't to imagine he was going to do it to save my face! Not at all. He didn't care for my face especially. He was going to haul down a mischievous character as his own contribution to progress and civilization and what not. It would be no particular trouble to him to do it—a pleasure really—and I was to dismiss the matter from my mind.

I supposed so. "You've got quite a considerable trading post and fur business out beyond the Peace, haven't you?"

"It is a fairish business," he admitted. "Why?"

"Suppose you just look after it and leave all these petty details to me. That would probably work out the best all round."

He said "Bah!" in a curt, disagreeable way and left me.

Within the week it began to snow; gently and with no more fuss or commotion than when a fog comes down from a mountain range. None of the blizzard antics that mark the snows of the southern prairies, where the wind goes crazy and whirls and worries the flakes under the bottoms of doors and fills odd corners with weird drifts. Not in the

northwest basin. When it's time for snow the clouds come down close to earth and deliver their burdens evenly; the light dry flakes pile as deep on an upright post or chimney-top as anywhere.

Naturally there was a relief in having it come since it was bound to do so. The barren desolate scrub took on a brightness, travel would start, now the stage was on runners again, and a stream of people begin to flow back and forth through Athabasca Landing. I was especially grateful on my own account. With the snow under foot most people had affairs of their own to engage them; firewood to cut and haul, provisions to lay in against the winter. Those in business made ready for their harvest time and such as had no business rested or prepared to go outside for a visit to Edmonton and beyond. I would be left free to think out my own good advice and follow it.

A general snowfall was always a favorite occasion for little minor rascalities to break out, especially among the Indians. Any tracks or signs made at such a time are promptly covered, thus giving considerable freedom to the paying off of debts of deviltry back and forth. If any of them had a job of thieving or elopement, or temporary abduction in his mind, that was the likeliest occasion for it to be carried out. I pounded around for several days locating everyone among the dusky brethren and letting them take comfort from the sight of my honest face. All was calm among them; those that had gone out to trap had got

away with the proper family and gear. Between this activity and keeping an eye on the first loads of freight to come in on the new snow, it was a week before I remembered Tommy Thomas. He wasn't around his cabin and I rode over to the Duncan post on a chance of seeing Annie.

There was no one in the trade room and finally Isabella appeared from her quarters in answer to my call.

"It seems I'll have to wait on you," she explained. "Father must be taking a nap and Annie is away just now. Which of these priceless treasures do you wish to buy?"

I chose a plug of smoking tobacco and had to cut it off the slab myself in the end. She admitted that merchandising prices were a secret to her but said I might take the plug on trial. If it proved satisfactory I could come back later and pay Brandy Shannon for it.

"Where is Brandy?" I asked.

"He and Thomas are in Edmonton this week. After goods I suppose, though I should think there was enough here to supply all the Indians in the world."

We talked about the prospect of recovering her coat and I told her not to worry; it was sure to be found. She was bearing up bravely, she said, only her father made heavy rumbling noises whenever it was mentioned. "He feels certain it was done to insult him personally."

"But who is there that would want to do that?"

She didn't know. "I am the only one that ever defies father, you know."

It wasn't hard to believe her equal to doing that. Maybe she had pinched her own coat for some reason connected with her father. But how? She was there at the time and so was every infatuated young man in the place who might have served her as accomplice. Big Annie was safe under lock and key. Nothing to be gained in guessing about her at least. I wondered if she had blandly lied about the absence of Brandy and Tommy Thomas, or was she herself deceived? For I knew most certainly they had not gone out the trail to Edmonton.

Two more days passed before they appeared again; I saw Brandy Shannon busy at his woodpile. And it was another day before I was closeted with Tommy Thomas. Something had come over the lad; I had to warn him twice before he would come to the barracks to see me; even then he was shy and difficult and appeared unwilling to talk.

"Where have you and Brandy been?" I wanted to know.

"Edmonton, I guess. Yes, sure! Ain't that some big town, Mr. Lynch?"

"Liar! You never went out that way."

Tommy shrugged. "I dunno. Brandy say Edmonton. You watchin' trail, huh?"

He was willing to be wrong but he wanted to let it go at that. My temper was more uncertain

than it usually is and I wanted particulars at once. I told Tommy so but he didn't warm up.

"What I'm gonna say? I say Edmonton, you say liar! All right. Maybe I ain't gonna say no more, huh? What I getting, come tell you ever'thing? Gettin' trouble, that's all. She's no good! Maybe you better catch some other fella tell you ever'thing."

I understood him then. Tommy was pretending to be offended at my calling him a liar, which he was, and suggesting a break of diplomatic relations between us. Unfortunately I needed him in my business and couldn't be bothered indulging his feelings. In another second I had my hands on Tommy's unwashed neck and was shaking him out. The way a lady shakes out a rug. Between shakes I kicked his feet out from under him and bounced him up and down on the floor. There was about a minute of this, I having determined to cure Tommy of some of his other defects while I was about it. I wasn't mad, not after I got my hands on him. If I had been, I would have stood him up and tried serving him against the wall and then batting the return as a kid does with a tennis ball. Tommy however was no fool; he made signs that we understood each other again so I dropped him.

"Speak freely, Tommy; you're among friends, you know! Besides I'm going to punch you a few if you don't."

"That's all right, Mr. Lynch! What you say, I gonna doing."

But first there was this; was Tommy going to jail? No matter what he said, so long as it was true? All right then. Brandy Shannon was crazy; he had been saying that Tommy would go to jail for fifty years if he said one word about their trip. But if I said no, why, Tommy believed it. It was my jail, wasn't it, and not Brandy Shannon's? I reassured him on that point and he unloaded his story with all the trimmings.

There had been a visitor to Duncan's post the day before it snowed, a Chippewayan Indian that really belonged down river somewhere, around the Great Slave Lake. Tommy Thomas had known the man since the winter he spent in that country driving dogs and running a trading post, along with the Company's factor, of course. Tommy ran the dogs and the factor ran the post. Well, he was an awful crooked guy, this Great Slave Indian, only now he lived upriver at the mouth of the Pembina and he wasn't any good. But he had been to Duncan's post before; sometimes he brought furs and traded them and sometimes he came with an empty sled and took away a load. Tommy didn't know what of. But he had been doing this for several years, sure, and sometimes he went upriver from the Landing and sometimes down. He traveled mostly alone and he always left at night.

Why hadn't he told me about this before? Well, good God, Mr. Lynch, I hadn't asked him! Besides, he didn't want to have anything to do with

crooks. Like that damn Malotte! Tommy was coming to that.

Well, it snowed the way I seen and in the night Brandy Shannon come and told him to get ready to go. They made good time up the Athabasca on the ice, and not out to Edmonton as Tommy said at first. He was only joking then. In two days they came to the mouth of Lesser Slave, and didn't I think that was going some? That's how good a dogs he had. The other Indian had five cases on his sled and Tommy didn't only have two and the grub and beds.

I stopped him. "What was in those cases, whisky?"

Tommy didn't guess he ever saw a whisky case. He thought it came in bottles. Honest, Mr. Lynch! Anyhow Brandy Shannon said it was cases of canned butter they were going to trade with a certain man. I didn't blame him if it was something else, did I?"

"Five and two are seven—times three, twenty-one!" I computed. "Eighty-four quarts! Imperials! Go on."

Well, at the mouth of Lesser Slave this other Indian left them and said go on to a certain creek and turn up it till they found a trapper's cabin in some spruce. There would be the man they wanted to find who had brought the wonderful skin up from beyond Great Slave last winter.

"What kind of skin?"

Tommy didn't suppose I knew anything about

musk-oxes, did I? "Musk-oxen? Certainly." Not an especially valuable skin though rare enough in the markets. They made wonderful sleigh robes, with their long heavy wool. I had seen them in Montreal.

Oh, big ones, maybe, Tommy explained; but did I ever see a calf skin? Not a good big calf but a wee little calf that didn't get had yet? Had I ever seen one of them kind?

"What do you mean? Unborn?"

Sure, that's what he meant. Like when a calf's old woman gonna die or maybe some sucker shoot her before the calf gets had. Mr. Lynch was an awful smart man but he guessed I didn't know much about that kind of a skin, did I? Tommy, he knew all about them and lots more besides. That's why he went on this trip. Captain Duncan called him in and asked him all about them on the day before they left. How big was one and what color and how long was the wool? All kinds of questions I could think of. Only the Captain didn't ask him anything about this Indian that come there like was he a crook or what? Tommy would have told him, sure, just like he always told Mr. Lynch whatever he asked him.

Anyhow that's what they were going to trade for; one of those kind of musk-oxes' skins. This other Indian had told Captain Duncan he saw one at this cabin and the big tough breed that had it wouldn't deal with no Indian that would get caught with it and maybe squeal to the Police. Just like he stole the skin somewheres, huh? So

the Captain sent Brandy Shannon to make the trade and Tommy with him because he knew the answer to so many questions. And that's everywhere they'd been and honest to God, Mr. Lynch! And it wasn't his fault that they got what Brandy Shannon said, dismayed. What did that mean, huh?

"So Brandy opened a case of his stuff and gave the breed a few drinks, did he? And then traded the rest for this skin?"

Oh, no, Mr. Lynch! Who did I think this breed was? He bet I couldn't guess. It was a nice cabin when they got there after dark. Tommy he called out "hullo" in Cree and somebody said come in. Three men in there with a candle burning and when Tommy and Brandy got inside the door they blew the candle out. Then—snick! Like that.

"What happened?"

Lights! Right into their eyes like seven hundred candles shining through a knot-hole. Everything dark behind those light and who gonna look quick with that fire-gun in his eyes? Somebody say Stickin' up the hands, and Tommy done so. Brandy Shannon he wanted to make a fight but somebody shoving a rifle-barrel in his stomach quick. Brandy Shannon sticking his hands up too. Pretty soon they both tied up nice and tight and sitting in a corner. Then—snick—again and all dark. What did I think? Damn funny business about that light!

"What next?" I asked.

Somebody light the candle again. "How do, boys?" Who did I think was there? That son-of-a-gun, Malotte! Yes, Mr. Lynch, and them two lousy Beavers brought the two cases inside and opened them. All full of bottles they were and had been since they left the Landing. And he never knew it! Wasn't that funny?

Well, Malotte he take that bottles and go away two three days, Tommy didn't remember. One of the Beavers sleep and one play with the rifle all the time. Tommy and Brandy Shannon they chopped the wood and cooked the grub. Lots to eat only Brandy wanted to make a fight all the time and got tied up again. Tommy he ate something all the time. Malotte came back and put a letter in the case for whisky and nailed it up again. A letter to Captain Duncan, Malotte explained, only who would believe such a liar and a crook. Then he took them back down the creek to the Athabasca and pointed for home with his rifle-barrel. He was going to think some, Malotte said, and when he got done thinking he was going to shoot some. And if they were still in sight—look out! But Malotte was not so smart. I knew what kind of a dogs Tommy had? They were out of sight before anybody going to think very hard, sure.

And that was all. Brandy Shannon he threw the empty cases away once and then went back and got them. Then he threw them in the fire but pulled them out again. All he said was, Jesu,

Jesu, what'll the Captain say, and crossed himself. What did I think was the matter with him?

"Where was the musk-oxen skin all the time?"

Tommy didn't see anything of it. Maybe there wasn't one at all and this Indian that said so was just a liar. Tommy didn't know much about it except that he wasn't going to jail like I said he wasn't. But maybe I understood everything, huh?

It was easy to understand. Wallis had simply baited a snare for the old Captain and caught him red-handed. Caught Brandy Shannon rather, which amounted to the same thing; Duncan would be obliged to cover Brandy if it came to a showdown, which it never would. The letter that Malotte sent back to the Captain was from Wallis no doubt, a cold-blooded threat to turn them up if he moved another bottle. Law and order and truth and purity would be upheld as long as Wallis had this club over Duncan's neck.

And that was all right only I couldn't see where I stood to get a promotion on the strength of it. Even if things stayed sweet forever after and the Inspector never gave me another dressing-down, still it was not so good as it looked. My pride was involved, you see; I had wanted his scalp for my personal collection.

Tommy Thomas was prowling hopefully around the room as if he expected to find something. Gosh, Mr. Lynch, didn't I got anything that would be good for his stomach? It felt funny. Maybe he was going to be sick if he didn't get a drink to

warm up his insides. It didn't look like I'd want him to get sick and die or something. After he'd told me everything.

In a drawer of my desk I found a little tin box full of pills. I gave them to him with directions to eat one every hour while they lasted. Tommy was a good boy; they were aspirin tablets.

XVII

Halliday went round in a glow of interest and excitement these days; he appeared to have no end of reasons for feeling a modest but distinct self-satisfaction. The weather was one thing. He revelled in the snow and cold, he said; it was the true color for the North to wear, a symbol of its harsh unyielding character. Somehow he had never been reconciled to the fierce summer sun and the near-tropical vegetation of that brief season. The sudden lush growth of pea vine, rank grasses that bordered the sloughs and swamps, wild-flowers rioting in the park-lands and burnings, these were a false note, a weakness almost, in the essential virility and hardness of the land. Didn't I think so? And take the trees for example! He had no feeling for the masses of growth, the poplar and willow and alder that covered the grim face of the North. True, they softened it in summer and their stark naked lines had beauty against the winter snow. But they were rubbish, really, mere underbrush to feed the land by their hurried succession of living and dying. His love was the spruce! The stern barbaric evergreens that held their ranks enduringly, these were the North to him. They kept its very spirit in their gloomy depths, aloof and unmindful of the swift decay that raged about their feet.

They meant a lot to him, those trees. Some of

them had personality, like people he had known. There was one green old giant standing apart from the rest, that reminded him of Captain Duncan. The same impression of age and inscrutable wisdom, alone and self-sufficient, about the tree as about the man. Had I never felt that way about trees and rivers and mountains? That they were persons in a greater sense and with spirits too vast and deep for mere frustration to beset them? Or doubts! And God! what grandeur, what valid sense of destiny must be in one with life-roots fixed so deeply in the past! Captain Duncan was like that; not old in years of course, but the man was time itself. All of his past, from that first fiery Kelt to bear the name, down the succeeding ages of his kind and clan; what they all had been was still in the Captain's blood and character. Courage and hardihood! In these and the will to triumph and endure, the Captain was like a noble, solitary tree. Didn't I think so?

But of course I had never come to know the Captain for what he was.

Halliday stood at my window with his eyes fixed on the green mass of spruce that lay behind the Landing, wonder and enchantment in his stare. It was all very strange; I could have stirred myself and blasted the fine image he had drawn, merely by telling the things I knew, but I didn't. Time enough, I thought, for him to come by the truth as he'd come by these illusions. Surely he would come to a place one day where the facts

would refuse to be translated into fancies. Then hell would pop! I knew those gentle trusting sorts; get one of them really mad once and he'd climb all over you before you knew it. Halliday would realize the truth about Duncan some day and from that hour he would be a man. I let him go on talking. It was a pleasant thought to entertain and then too, I liked the fine strong words he used.

And why wouldn't the Captain be misunderstood? He was indeed alien to the common run of men; the direct and narrow line of his descent had concentrated his character instead of diffusing it as was the usual case. It was like the wisdom evolved and handed down by some of the older animals. Like that giant weasel, the wolverine, he thought. Did I know much about them?

I knew a lot about them, I said; one of them killed a good dog for me once. I knew other things too, that were not to the credit of any man or animal.

Oh, I meant their cunning perhaps, and the clever manner they had of robbing trap-lines? That was the brute of it, naturally, that the fittest should endure. But it was their history he had in mind, their sole survival out of all their kind. Their cunning and sagacity had its beginnings in pre-historic life, and it was only—

I broke him up on that, however. I asked him where the blame thing got its smell. And as I suspected, he'd never met one on the hoof nor had

a good dog taken apart by one of them, or he wouldn't have cited the things as bright examples.

"You'd better stick to the trees and mountains for inspiration and not drag in the king of all the skunks. That comparison will get you into trouble if the old man hears of it."

He laughed and said it was like me to criticize an animal for being an animal.

"Anybody would think it was the Captain you were in love with," I told him. "What about Isabella? Haven't you got a few choice words to say on her side?"

There weren't any words for her, he explained, which wasn't exactly original of him. The two relations were entirely different, he declared. With the Captain it was friendship, based on mutual understanding and appreciation. He thought perhaps the Captain had found a more adult mentality in him than might have been expected. In friendship one took and took without thought of compensation. With love it was otherwise. One gave in love, and in giving were its hungers fed. He loved Isabella—

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "Are you regularly and openly engaged to that girl?"

He said that any announcement would be premature; he was speaking confidentially to me of course.

"But have you told her any of this you are telling me? Is it understood between you?"

That sobered him. He admitted that it wasn't.

"She's been so upset over losing her coat, you know. I feel somehow, that it wouldn't be considerate of me to press the subject just now. She understands my feelings even if I've not spoken them. As I understand hers. It's hardly a thing that need be expressed in words."

"I see! You don't even need to let on to her about it but you come here and go into delirious delights to me! What are you trying to do; destroy me or send me off into a decline of some sort? Hereafter, don't let me hear another word about her until you can show that you have got your option signed. And out loud in plain language too. I've got to protect myself, you know."

Halliday asked me not to be crass. If I was in a hurry, why didn't I find her coat and remove that distraction. When things were as they had been, he would satisfy my condition soon enough.

"Don't wait on that," I told him. "Things will probably never be the way they were. They never have been for that matter, and it's a cinch they won't be again!"

XVIII

Halliday and I were eating supper one evening not long after, when young Foley came into Louis' dining room and said to Halliday: "Hey, they's an express parcel came in tonight for you. Least it's in care of you. Come over and get it as soon as you're done, will you? It's on a seal and five hundred value. I don't want it layin' round."

Halliday started to be pretty certain that there was some mistake about it being for him. He wasn't expecting an express parcel. But young Foley looked knowing and said: "Oh, you'll claim it all right! It ain't only in care of you, see?"

Halliday and I went down together as soon as we finished supper. There was no doubt about it, Foley had a sealed parcel prepaid, as he pointed out, and addressed quite thoroughly to Miss Isabella Duncan, care of Eugene Halliday, Athabasca Landing, Alberta. Young Foley indicated the valuation of five hundred dollars on the sticker and that was all he knew about it. He clearly stood willing to learn more if Halliday cared to tell it, curiosity being fully developed in the enterprising young man. But Halliday failed to make any guess as to its contents for Foley's benefit. He signed for the parcel and carried it off with him. On the way to his office he invited me to heft its weight.

"What do you think, could it be the stolen coat?"

"It could," I said, "easy as not." We both considered this possibility till we got inside his office. He lit the lamp and then came to stand in front of me and think furiously.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "And I was right, Constable, from the beginning. Don't you see; that scoundrel Wallis stole the coat or had one of his Indians do it. He took it to Edmonton when he went, in spite of your watching him. It's a clever scheme, diabolically clever, now I begin to see the motives all through."

I was not keeping up with him, it seemed. "What motives?"

"He stole it to avenge himself on Miss Duncan and her father, just as I told you! He's had it kept somewhere all this time and now it is sent back this way, through me, understand, in order to cast suspicion on me. The blackguard! He'd know the position it puts me in, the coat coming back to her from me. What's the first thing that occurs to you in connection with that fact? Why? Why does it come in care of me? Just as that idiot Foley wanted to ask but daren't. Of course I don't know, but who will believe me? It's clever, I tell you. He failed to interest Isabella in himself and this is an effort to cheat her of me. It's a wonder the beast hadn't found a way of claiming the reward as well."

I had balked at the first hurdle. "Look here;

there's one place you might be wrong! And if you are, then it's all wrong. Suppose this isn't her coat at all?"

"Of course—but heavens, Constable, why would any parcel of hers come through me? I swear I know nothing about it."

"Don't be obtuse," I cautioned him. "Suppose—just suppose—she did some mail order shopping and didn't want the dear old papa to know of it till too late for him to do anything but roar. If it had come to her direct, Foley would have jumped on a horse and run him all the way out there with it. Father would hear the racket and maybe make a scene and compel her to refuse it. Humiliating scene!"

Halliday was looking at the label on the parcel in the light of this brilliant suggestion. "J. Silverman! That's a dummy name, no doubt."

"Certainly not! That's Jake Silverman, Ltd., Manufacturing Furrier, Jasper Avenue, Edmonton. High-class Furs Only. You should see what a payroll he's got! I know Jake well. He made one mistake that I know of, but he's no dummy. Maybe the girl has bought herself another coat."

Halliday didn't believe it and for that matter neither did I, but he got enough comfort out of the possibility to take the parcel up to her and learn the worst. He stopped outside the door though, to tell me it was all ridiculous. If Isabella had wanted a new coat she had only to ask her father for it; he never denied her anything.

"But maybe he's got a poor feeling just now. That's a chronic ailment with some of the Scotch, you know."

"Rubbish!" he snorted. "I'm familiar enough with—"

"Oh, hell, maybe it's a present! Take it along and find out."

I didn't realize it till later, but I was practically inspired just then. My offhand guesses had been right in every particular. It wasn't the stolen coat at all but a new coat that Isabella had ordered from Silverman. The Captain didn't know anything about it and probably wouldn't until she caught him in an expansive humor. Halliday rushed back at midnight, to tell me all about it. He had delivered the parcel to her privately and then explained both our guesses, his and mine, before he let her open it. She undid it and tried it on and then admitted that my guesses were the truth, even to her reason for having it come through Halliday.

"And she said something very nice about you, Constable. Don't you wish I'd tell you?"

"I could guess that too," I said. "I only wish she'd write me a reference to Old Fury on the strength of it."

But Halliday declared I would never guess it; Isabella had said that I was a very wise and gallant gentleman!

The coat was quite unlike the stolen one but a marvelous thing, none-the-less, Halliday said.

And the whole effect when she slipped it on was exotic; one couldn't imagine anyone else wearing it. He hadn't been able to identify the fur it was made of and she wouldn't tell him. His opinion had run to undyed seal but he would have to look it up in a book he had at home. I excused him and went back to bed.

It was no trouble to me to identify the kind of fur in Isabella's new coat when I saw it next day. I had only to ask Malcolm Fraser after Isabella had stopped a moment to speak with us in front of Malcolm's post. It was a short affair, the new coat, reaching just below the hips, but the effect, as Halliday had said, was doggy beyond all words. A rich deep fawn was the general color scheme, with collar and cuffs of some light brown fur that was longer and deeper than the rest. Of course we exclaimed over it right off, and she was pleased and gave Malcolm permission to feel the texture of it. While he polished his spectacles for a closer examination, I stared at it with non-professional interest. The fur in the body of it was minutely fine and of good length but slightly waved in dead flat curls. Yet for all the flatness of the fur and its pale coloring, it had a sheen that gave the sense of depth when looking at it.

Knowing he would likely never be obliged to make an offer for it, Malcolm felt free to admire it openly. He gave it a conscientious inspection, lifting a corner to study the reverse side where the lining was open at the bottom. And as each point

of it won his approval, he clucked or made a benevolent grunting sound through his nose. Isabella enjoyed it, posing and turning to let us get the full effect.

"'Tis a wondrous handsome bit of fur, lass; shockin'ly handsome! I doot ye're aware what it is?"

She laughed. "To be sure I know!"

"Aye, then the both of us know. But ye'll have need to be over-carefu' wi' this one. It would be a great pity to have it stole like the ither."

Malcolm looked after her with further cluckings as she went on toward the mission.

"Don't seem to me I recognize that fur," I remarked.

"Ye wouldn't," said Malcolm. "But it's no a fault in ye this time, Constable. There's not many would do so. Even yon lass is but makin' believe to know what it is she's wearin' so proudly."

"All right," I said, "we'll agree that you're the brightest one in the class. Now tell us what it is."

"'Tis musk-oxen, that's what it's," Malcolm stated. "A wee calfskin—"

"I know! One that didn't got had yet. I know all about them."

Malcolm scowled disagreeably at me. "Ye know nothing! An' such extemporisin', on the strength of mere ignorance, is wicked. Look now, I'll tell ye the history of yon animal, to the end ye may be spared fra jeopardisin' yer soul wi' prevarication.

An' who could know better nor me the nature of such rare beasties—half cattle and half sheep, at least. Did I no tell ye of the bitter time—”

“Never!” I lied.

“’Gin ye’ll hold yer gawb I’ll tell ye!”

XIX

So Malcolm minded the time he journeyed with an Indian lad over the broken height of land that divides the waters of Great Slave Lake from those of Hudson's Bay. 'Twas in winter time and that bitter cold he feared for his life, what with the Indian being a poor weakling sort and his dogs half famished, they were, over the want of fish to stay their bellies. Aye, and many a stouter man might well have cowered from the sting of a cruel wind that lashed across their faces, and turned back again to the station on the Chesterfield Inlet. But not he! 'Twas not in the blood of a Fraser—Eh? The musk-oxen? He was not leaving them out of the story, not at all! And would I oblige with the least bit of respect and attention till an account of the fierce struggle for survival among the primitive brutes of God's creation was given me? If I purposed to continue my way through life in the state of besotted ignorance—very good then!

So they crawled their way, Malcolm and the miserable Indian and the dogs that had no fish to their bellies, mind ye, across that frightful barren waste with the whirl of frozen snow cutting their faces to shreds. And what should the Indian do but stop short in his tracks one day, miserable and all as he was, and the dogs too, lifting their muzzles against the wind and whimpering? They at

once made fast the gluttonous dogs against the threat of their eating the remaining scraps of food on the sled and drew their arms, the Indian and Malcolm, and crept forward into the wind with that strong scent of musk filling their nostrils. They found the cause of it at last, and God, what a sight! A tragic spectacle; a conflict of abysmal savagery and cunning on a scale that few men are given to witness.

Musk-oxen! Two score at least of the lusty shaggy ones huddled at bay before a pack of wolves! With the cover of a few great bulks of stones behind them—yon was an ancient morainic field, if I cared to note the geology—backed against these stones, the males and barren cows guarded the outer rim of a crowded circle, shoulder to shoulder and with their horns, broad at the base as your hand, and their buttressed foreheads turned toward the enemy. There was no saying how long this silent struggle had endured. Silent, that is, until some hunger-maddened wolf would launch himself with fearsome snarls against the ring in hope of drawing one forward in attack. And always a second or third wolf crouched at the side ready to rush and cut off the unwary victim should he charge. Ah, the savage deviltry and cunning of those wolves, baiting and worrying at the ring of lowered flashing horns and massive heads; taking their turns at this while the remainder ranged about, squatting in the snow and waiting with the diabolical patience of their kind.

Aye, but the cunning, it was not all on the one side. These oxen were skilled fighting men in their own right and had more in their shaggy heads than mere self-defence. They took their toll as Malcolm and his pusillanimous Indian crouched behind the cover of rocks and watched the scene. One, a cow of no more than medium stature, made pretense of sallying forward against her tormentor. 'Twas but a ruse though a most convincing one, she lunging from the ranks with a wild high bawl of rage and distraction, and her move appeared most lunatic to Malcolm for the moment. The wolf pressed savagely to draw her yet a few steps more till his mates, crouched flat on either hand, could dare to fling themselves on her uncovered flank and cut her hamstrings.

Not quite was she exposed, however, when she began retreating, doggedly, stubbornly backward from the wolf's headlong assault, uttering her terror-stricken bawl as she did so. It was that voice alone that proved the wolf's undoing, luring him to abandon caution by the note of panic in it. The line had opened wide as she gave back, her mates shrinking away from the danger, seemingly, till she was fair inside the ring and the wolf commanded a goodish sector within the circle. For that moment, the defending hosts seemed to be wavering at the point where a determined charge in force would have opened them—put their numbers to route leaving the younglings and they ones

big with calf to be dragged down to death at those horrid bristling fangs.

But 'twas so for just the barest moment; indeed a man less cognizant of the principles of military tactics might not have noted it. Malcolm had barely cocked and leveled his sturdy fowling piece, intent on throwing the weight of his support to the ruminants as against the carnivores, when the climax fell. It came with an explosive rush of the frenzied oxen to close the gap; a charging phalanx of curved black horns like scimitars and heads like battering-rams that closed on the wolf from the sides while the cow lunged wickedly at his front. Malcolm retained the indelible image of that mistaken wolf, all safety or escape suddenly denied him, in the palsied moment before he paid for his indiscretion with his life.

He was crushed and trampled and gored, death touched him in a score of places, before the line reformed and his broken carcass with its guts trailing after it, was tossed to his companions outside the ring. 'Twas such a thrilling consummation of wits and canny skill as one might well expect from beasts that had fought the saber-tooth and the cave-bear back in the fearful ages of the past. No doubt it was a secret hidden from me that these grand animals, orphaned now of all their kin or kind, had come down to us from beyond the dawn of historic time. Aye, 'twas then they had learnt their craft; when they ranged the north European savannas, along with the reindeer and the giant elk

and the aurochs that was father to all the oxen and cattle-beasts, save only the musk-oxen. Aye, and there was the monster mammoth and the woolly rhinoceros abroad in the land at that time and the horse was an Eohippus and no higher than my knee. That was the long way a bit of skin had come to cover the back of yon fine-haired lass and her not appreciating it; since long beyond the time when my personal ancestors were screaming their gibberish from tree-tops, while his, Malcolm's, had already driven the bear and the tiger from his cave and were busily gravating the proofs of their culture upon its walls.

But och, how could such a one as me be lifted to a vision of life in that heroic day? I was much too civilized; the boots on my feet, a thousand comforts to shield my puny body where a coat of stiff bristling hairs was meant to do; these and soft foods for my belly were the concerns of a spirit like mine.

Where was the high old courage gone; the untamed lusts of men that ranged the earth and conquered it? Men that tore out the vitals of their prey with naked hands and ate them raw? Pah! They were gone; dead now and rotted away in the good green earth. And a race of pale soft worms held life at bay with a thousand cunning inventions hatched out of their maggoty brains; swathing their cringing nakedness in layers of wool, surrounded by pots and kettles, with their lives committed to the concoction of seasoned messes to fill

their bellies with. Where were the men, the forth-right warrior men to lead their own brave lives in this crawling world and point the way back to virtue and simplicity again? Tell him that, would I, Policeman?

I actually think Malcolm would have tried to paste me, scrawny runt that he was, if I'd opened my face. His temperature was high and he plainly thirsted for the taste of blood. I was accustomed to have Malcolm run to feeling when he was telling his wild stories, but never anything like this. The snow was packed down in a four-foot circle where he had pawed and stamped. I had suffered minor casualties myself, a button near gone from my tunic and various bruises and abrasions on my arms and abdomen. For Malcolm had demonstrated his fight on me; grabbed my sleeve and worried it when he was a wolf and as a defiant bull he had gored and butted at my stomach with a stiff and horny thumb. I ventured to ask what happened to the rest of his story, as I really wanted to hear it again, considering it the best part of the yarn.

Oh, aye! He'd not forgotten, not at all. Now where was he?

"The bulls had just pulled the famous squeeze play on the bear," I prompted.

"Liar!" said he. "'Twas no bear but scores and scores of fierce wolves. I mind now!"

Well then, no sooner had the wolf been through the mill and the empty tossed back—for refilling

I suppose—than his brethren fell upon his mortal remains and began to devour them in a most unchristian manner. Malcolm saw fu' clearly the time had come to announce their presence and he bade the incompetent and worthless Injun take sight on a promising young bull among the musk-oxen whilst he drew aim on the wolf pack. They fired as one and Malcolm therewith leapt into sight of the astonished creatures and, waving his arm exultantly aloft, uttered the wild, demoniacal, hair-raising, spine-wilting battle-cry of the clan Fraser. In Gaelic, Malcolm explained and which I understood to be the vernacular equivalent of "Hide out, little ones; dad's coming home with a jag!"

The effect upon the contending forces of the rifle-shots and this yell, coupled with the sight of Malcolm, gathered on the outskirts of their battle area, and apparently about to launch a charge in mass upon them, the effect of all this was instantaneous! The band of musk-oxen uttered a concerted "Woosh!" and departed northeast by north across that corner of the Barren Lands that lay before them, continuing, probably, by way of Baffin Land and the Davis Straits to some point in North Greenland where they would likely halt for a breathing spell and wait for the stragglers to come up. The wolves, for their part, chose a course that led due elsewhere and departed likewise at a rate of land miles per hour that brought them in considerable danger of over-running the Dominion of Canada very shortly. As Malcolm told it, they

displayed no hesitation whatever in deciding to abandon the dead and fly.

So they camped overnight there and dressed out the carcass of the bull and removed the pelts also from Malcolm's wolf and a second one brought down by his faithful Injun companion while Malcolm was giving tongue to his Highland yell. They fed the patient loyal dogs on choice cuts of wolf meat and much offal from the residue of the bull. And when they had made the Artillery Lake and through it to the shores of Great Slave and home again to the old Fort Resolution, why, Malcolm earned the commendation of the factor there by turning over the oxen skin and a brace of wolf pelts, all shot cleanly through the head, as compensation for the time wasted on the way. This incident drew the attention of his superiors to him and marked the beginning of Malcolm's upward rise in the Company's service. A happy ending; as I was accustomed to have Malcolm end this particular story. I thanked him.

"But look ye, Constable," he said. "I must be havin' a word with ye one of the days."

"See me later," I suggested. "It's nearly lunch-time now."

Isabella was coming back down the street and I had just thought of something. Malcolm took the hint and went inside to berate Bawb Nichols for dressing the window with brightly-colored blankets instead of the plainer shades, lest even a winter sun might fade the dyes and depreciate

them. Isabella stopped in front of me and smiled and said: "Well?" as if she knew I was waiting for her.

"I do wonder what men find to talk about so earnestly. Not gossip, surely?"

"Not gossip for once," I replied. "I have just made a hurried trip back to the other end of Time with Malcolm Fraser. It was very interesting to see how folks lived then. Did you know that your Scottish ancestors had gone in for the higher arts when mine were still swinging by their tails in trees?"

"I once said that you were very wise," she laughed.

"That's right! And to demonstrate it, that's musk-oxen calf, that coat you're wearing. In case you didn't know," I added.

"Musk-oxen calf? Really? And what made you think I didn't know?"

"An unborn calf, very likely; that accounts for the wavy lines of the hair. I just felt you didn't know."

"I didn't," she admitted.

"Yes. And now, my dear, tell me if you have any idea at all who sent it to you and why?"

It was bold of me, both the language and the assumption, but I was feeling very subtle all at once and had just admitted being wise. Isabella studied me a moment, a veil of caution lending a very practical quality to her eyes.

"I said also that you were gallant and a gentle-

man," she observed, as if questioning that judgment now.

"I know!" I said. And being far from squashed, I shrugged. One of those aggravating gestures that are presumed to convey such quantities of expression—indifference, doubt, resignation, surrender or defiance. With a little assistance of brows and lips that particular hitching of the shoulders and a slight wrist movement is reckoned to declare any or all of these emotions or even none whatever. I was uncertain which I had meant, but there was no harm in seeming a bit complex. "Let it stand," I said. "You needn't answer if you'd rather not. But being so wise, my guess is that you haven't an idea."

"But of course I have," she laughed. "I imagined you understood where this coat came from."

"Only the explanation you gave Halliday," I said. "And, as he had just given it to you and I had previously given it to him, that story was home again, you see. It may be my own story but I hesitate to believe it."

"That's unfair, Constable! You should stick to your own positions."

"It doesn't matter," I said. "But tell me this, won't you, about your other coat; don't you really know who stole it?"

"I do not," she answered. "And I should like to. In fact, there are a good many things I should like to know just now."

"I'll keep an ear to the ground," I volunteered.

"If I hear any reasonable answers, I'll note them down and then we can see if your questions match. How's that?"

She said it would be splendid and laughed so gaily as she started to go that I gave her a correct regimental salute, clapping my heels together and making the spurs jangle smartly.

I was not much wiser than before except for knowing now, that Tommy Thomas' story was not founded on a myth. There was such a thing as a musk-oxen calfskin. And before very long, surely, I would know where this one came from and where the other one had gone. Interesting knowledge if I acquired it, but of no particular benefit to me as a Policeman.

XX

"It's about the Duncan," explained Malcolm when he stopped in at the barracks to have his few words with me. "It has been running in my mind that an understanding atween us would be beneficial to both. Ye are an enterprising, ambitious young man, Constable, an' 'tis well ye should have a thought to the future."

"Now wait; is this to be official in any way?"

"Not at all, Constable. Have off yer jacket if it hampers ye. 'Tis only that I am able to see where our interests, official and personal, are one. In the matter of wishin' to put an end to the connivin' an' treacherous schemin' of an onprincipled scoundrel an' enemy of order and justice an' the legitimate pursuit of prosperity, I mean, Constable."

"And you seriously tag Duncan with being that?"

"Aye, an' more!" Malcolm declared. "Yon scalawag is all that an' more."

"I think you're slightly feverish," I told him. "For my part, he's a wily old buck that has come here and edged into your game and made a go of it by turning a sharp trick once in a while, and maybe a little law-breaking as a side-line. I'm by way of suspecting him of it, at least. But if you're inviting me to a session of hammer practice against

him, on general principles, I'm out. It would be a waste of time."

"It would that," agreed Malcolm. "But have ye ever known me to fritter my time wi' footless jawin', Constable?"

"Well, for the sake of no argument, say I haven't. But you've got to come clean, if you have anything more than a general grievance against him."

"I make no pretence of comprehendin' yer allusion to cleanliness, Constable, but I'll be frank wi' ye. Do ye imagine I'd be displayin' concern over the paltry competition he offers here, wi' his peddlers pack of goods an' the triflin' trade he could draw to him, if it was only that? Mind ye, there's not been two thousand of stock on his shelves at one time in these years. Not at all! 'Tis this way; but in confidence, mind."

And Malcolm leaned over the table and lowered his voice, ominously. "The Duncan is no competin' openly but by stealth an' trickery! In a wide district beyond, upstream and down on the river, he is skimming the thick cream of the trade. Do you fancy he troubles himself with the commoner skins; the muskrat, the lynxes, the red fox, or even the beaver, except they be very prime an' in matched lots? Not he! He goes for the marten, fisher, and the best foxes; crosses and silvers, and an otter betimes, or a lot of the ermine. Man, there has not been a prime silver turned in for these years he has been here! At the posts that are

reached by his intrigues, I mean. 'Tis the Company, us and the French, to hold open the posts an' put out the grub-stakes, aye, support the wretched Indians an' get for return, the bare value of what we advance. Never a bit of neat profit in an exceptional piece of fur, never. All the precious qualities, the rare ones, find their way into Duncan's hands. Dear God, when I think of the worth of his shipments last winter—'tis well known to us, mind—I wonder that virtue and honesty was ever invented! An' how does he manage it, Constable?"

"Whisky?" I suggested.

"Aye, whusky an' the poorest and rawest there is to be had! So ye'll see there is something in common atween us; a joint concern for purgin' the region of lawless and dangerous characters. An' on my own account I have no been idle since the condition was brought to my attention by the Superintendent of posts. My agent is engaged in observing the villain's movements and save only two, the facts are now in my hands."

"Which two?" I asked, thinking that between us we might have evidence enough to make a case.

"I have not yet determined how he gets the stuff into his hands," Malcolm explained, "nor have I discovered who distributes it for him afterward."

"You're doing fine! Now get either of those facts and we can act."

This was meant for sarcasm but Malcolm complacently missed it. "I'll come by it soon," he de-

clared. "My agent is active an' following my instructions. We'll trap the weasel! Just you hold yersel' in readiness to act promptly. Ye have a fine arm, Constable; 'twould carry a set of stripes most fittingly."

Malcolm would see to it, he promised. Not of his own influence perhaps, though it would be ample, mind ye, but through his superiors and mine. A word from Farquhar, the Company's superintendent of posts, to the Inspector of Police, would suffice. And Malcolm would see to it, once the machinations of this Duncan had been stopped. I was but to keep on the alert and stand ready for action. Together we would bring it off in ship-shape style.

On the face of it the scheme looked sound to me. Malcolm was nobody's fool and the most of a lifetime spent among the Indians and breeds had taught him the ins and outs of their devious natures. And he had a powerful organization behind him; the most powerful of any of us perhaps. The Police held responsibility for the Indians' behavior of course, and the missions and priests looked after the state of their souls. But it was the fur companies with their credit and grub-stakes that struck nearest to the Indian heart; they had the condition of his belly in their hands. I had the Law and the priests had God behind them, but Malcolm and his kind had Hunger; the ever-threatening hunger of the North as their ally. And that was one safe bet. An Indian might take his chance on going

to jail or even going to hell, but going hungry was different. They understood that.

Malcolm would know how to get the dope on Duncan and I would pull off the job when the time came.

"Who is your man? You better tell me. An Indian, I suppose?"

But Malcolm thought it best I should not know. They were a cautious, secretive lot, the Indians, and his man had made the condition that his part in the matter was not to be known, even to me. It was better so. He could vouch for the man's integrity and Malcolm's hold on him was very secure, I was to understand. It would be, I thought; trust Malcolm for thoroughness in a thing like that. Quite different to the haphazard relation I maintained with Tommy Thomas!

Still, I couldn't complain of Tommy; not just then, at least. It was nearly a week later that I began to smell the suggestion of cheese about his latest story to me. Halliday had come in to my place to explain a joke. It was about Isabella, of course, and her new coat: Captain Duncan had sent the skin to Edmonton and had that coat made up as a surprise. It was sent in Halliday's name, merely to mystify her! I didn't believe it and said so.

"But I was there," Halliday insisted. "She had suspected it was his doing all along and fibbed to us about having ordered it till she could be sure. She had to deceive us, really, until her father could

be made to admit it. Of course she couldn't accept such a thing as a gift from anyone else, you know."

"I suppose not! And since she had accepted the thing, it must have been from her father, eh?"

"Certainly," said Halliday. "She was only pretending till she could make sure. I was there when she put it on and called him in. 'How do you like my new coat, father? It's musk-oxen calf-skin, you know.' It was most amusing to see him pretend to be greatly surprised. Finally he said: 'And how do you like it, my dear?' He pinched her cheek and smiled. 'We do love our games with each other, don't we?' It was a—a beautiful moment between them," Halliday sighed. "I wish you could have seen it!"

"So do I wish it!" I said. "But why are you certain he only pretended to be surprised? Maybe the whole thing was a bluff on his part."

"Nonsense!" said Halliday. "What had he to bluff about? He told us the whole story. He got hold of the skin only since her other coat was stolen. It's unborn calf-skin, you know. This Silverman is a good friend of his; he's sold him thousands of dollars' worth of fur."

Well, that last part was the truth anyway. But had the Captain really got hold of that skin? Then Tommy Thomas was a most horrible liar and I would—

"Leave me," I said to Halliday. "I am going to think for a few minutes and if I come out where I expect, I'm going to kill a man."

"What an absurd thing to say! But I was just going; I only thought you would enjoy the joke of it."

"I do. Ha-ha!"

"They're so clever and subtle in their relations. I like people that way, don't you? It stimulates one!"

"I don't like people to be too damn clever—no. It depresses me!"

It was already dark then and I prepared to make some real medicine for once. In another hour I had Tommy Thomas on the carpet with the door locked behind him and blankets hung over the windows. What I had in mind was not covered by regular instructions in the manual, but we'd been told to use common sense in dealing with all matters not definitely touched upon.

I laid my left hand affectionately on Tommy's shoulder and held my right up before his face. "My son, look at this carefully," I told him, and slowly arranged it into a fist. It was a good, effective-looking fist, too. I had a moment of pride in it myself. Tommy was fascinated with it. I called his attention to its hardness and the rough, bony edges and the stout way it was coupled onto my forearm—a fist that would likely not break off easily. I asked him: "What do you think would happen if that thing was bounced hard against your nose?"

Tommy gave me an uneasy grin. "Huh! My nose, she'll gonna back up, sure!"

The next half hour I worked on him, taking him back and forth over the story he'd told. I wouldn't have hit him really, but I was the only one of us who knew it. Tommy was nervous but accurate. No, sir, I could cut his heart out, Mr. Lynch, but that Captain Duncan never got no skin, sure, from that trip up-river. I could ask Brandy Shannon. Or that big Malotte! Honest the truth, Mr. Lynch!

"Then where did he get the one in that coat he gave the girl?" I demanded.

Tommy shrugged. Was that a musk-oxen skin?

"You liar! Didn't you claim to know all about them?"

Oh, yes, but not after they got made up into clothes. That was different. And lying, that was one thing Tommy wouldn't do. No, sir! If anybody asking he was going to say right. That's all.

I chased him out then and gave myself over to thought. Where was the truth? Was Tommy one of those great liars that are sometimes born in every race? Or was Halliday a fool and being deceived by a little team-work between Isabella and the Captain? Or was Isabella honest about it and only the Captain quick-witted enough to turn the coat incident to his own account? Claiming he was a friend of Silverman! That would be to prepare Halliday against anything he might hear to the contrary. But why? Why did he need to fatten his reputation with Halliday when he was going to have him for a son-in-law anyhow?

I revolved those questions round in my mind along with the big one: who stole the coat? But I didn't unwind any answers to them. And from wondering about them so often I got to feeling calloused and insensible in the brain, at least where they were concerned. That condition had existed for a week and was showing every indication of becoming permanent when the worst finally came to the worst. The Inspector O'Neill paid me the honor of a sudden visitation! Fortunately for me, his arrival fell on the one day when I was actually engaged on legitimate Police duty. Otherwise he might have burst in and found me with my boots off recuperating on my bunk.

But young Foley had come to me in a state of extreme agitation that morning. His Baldy-horse had slipped his halter in the night and gone on a prowl round the Landing. This would not ordinarily have been a matter calling for more than an expression of sympathy from me. But when Baldy failed to check in for his breakfast, Foley had made a search for him and had come on disturbing news in the Indian village above town. Baldy, rumor had it, departed that morning in the direction of Sawridge, and he bore, moreover, an Indian on his back. Some of the lads had decided to make a visit to that part, and the pudding-headed Baldy had furnished himself as a mount for one of the party. Young Foley was wrought up in proportion to his sense of importance. Here he hadn't lost so much as a collar-pad in the months

he'd been stable-boss and he was profanely expressed if he meant to start in by having a horse shanghaied on him. This was a plain case, with the horse-thief's name and everything! So, was I going to do something, or would he have to take the law into his own hands?

I told Foley to keep his hands in his pockets; that I alone would pursue this desperate character and recover his bald-faced hay-destroyer before another day had dawned. Accordingly then, I laced the corset on old Rheumatiz, my faithful Police charger, and set out. He sensed the tension of impending combat, knew it was Duty that beckoned us on. God knows he should have done so—Rheumatiz was probably bouncing Policemen around when I was a boy in short pants. They used to issue darned good horses in the Service, but they didn't do it very often. This old boy stubbed along manfully, however, for the first hour. Then he seemed to figure that we had reached the end of my jurisdiction and it was time to turn back. For the next hour I had practically to work my way and at the end of that time, I caught sight of them.

They were trailing along with the Baldy-horse in the rear as I expected. This was no horse-stealing, understand; merely a case of a man and a horse going the same way and the horse giving the man a ride. This lad riding Baldy probably looked at it that way and had nothing more than a stick to keep the horse on the trail. At the first alarm he

would slide off and make for the brush and the rest could swear that the fool horse had followed them. I knew it was only necessary for him to see me for that Indian to disappear, but I felt entitled to something for the trouble I'd taken. I kept back till Rheumatiz recovered his vigor and a good chance occurred to surprise my victim.

I held there till they were passing through a spruce thicket and then I charged up on them. It worked fine; I didn't even have to dismount in order to rebuke that Indian. He had just turned to look back when the long arm of the law went round him. Hoisting him across the withers of my horse, face down, I kept him on balance with one hand and beat time with the other. This other hand had a riding crop in it—a good durable piece of leather and whalebone—and I impressed it faithfully on that boy's remainder before I unloaded him.

"Now, my lad," I said, "did you happen to see a bald-faced stage-horse along the trail this morning?"

He hadn't. I got that much from the shake of his head, but he seemed so confused and embarrassed at meeting me out there that I didn't press the subject. I headed Baldy back into the trail and chased him home.

There would be no occasion for recounting all this except to show the reasons I had for feeling virtuous over the morning's work. A citizen's property recovered to him and an erring soul put

on the road to a fuller, richer life. Naturally I was shocked and horrified to see the Inspector's driver standing in front of the stage stable when I rode up. Old Fury himself was weaving up and down on the front porch of Papineau's hotel. I yanked Rheumatiz to a halt and gave him the full salute. Glad to do it, too!

Waiting had not improved the old gentleman's temper.

"Stable your horse!" he snapped. "And open your barracks for inspection."

I had him there, though. He stamped through the place, turning out every last article on the list, and finally coming to stand in front of me and glare. There was not the least little thing wrong with my place and he knew it. Meantime of course, I was a piece of living statuary—at attention in the middle of the room. Then Old Fury caught his breath and began to rave. Rave and swear. He began on me, thumping his fist on the table and demanding to be told what kind of a blink, blank blockhead—and so on. It didn't take long to exhaust the subject of my shortcomings—he grouped them broadly—and from that he branched out. When our dear old inspector swore, he swore! He laid out the known spaces of the earth in sections and then he damned them individually and collectively; he damned all the living creatures thereon above one inch in height or over one minute of age. Damn this, that and the other; damn everything! But me most of all.

Just as I'd begin to get a trifle bored by his generalities, there'd be a relapse on the subject of me. He said things about me that I wouldn't have thought of in a thousand years; things so awfully outrageous that they were downright interesting. Just to think about. It seemed to me I'd never heard him come up to what he did that morning. Of course no ordinary man could have done it. He was the perfect combination of temperament and training; a tallish, soldierly, red-faced man with the two waxed spikes of his mustache fairly darting away from his upper lip. A typical fire-eating officer of cavalry, with all the wealth of local color acquired during his Boer war service to draw upon. No wonder I felt it was an education, just to hear him.

But, seemingly right in the best of it, he stopped and drew a long breath and removed the threat from his countenance.

"Thank God and the priest that's over," said he.

He took off his belt and tunic and flung them on the table and stretched himself out on my bed. "Now, Lynch, my boy, tell us about it," he invited. "What kind of a box are they tryin' to put you in down here? There's a wrong 'un hereabouts and we're obliged to stamp on him. This liquor-running along the river—out with it now!"

I made myself comfortable and began to sketch my ideas on the subject. In a minute or two I put a question that he didn't answer. He was peacefully asleep. The purple had been drained from

his face and it was a fresh ruddy pink again. That was Old Fury. Hell had been duly raised, discipline maintained at all costs and now, when he had caught a couple of winks, it would be, "Well, Lynch, my boy, let's see what's to be done!" This old hellion was a man, you see!

In another five minutes he was awake, refreshed and in his right mind.

"Very good," he remarked. "Now whom do you suspect? And why?"

I told him that Duncan had been my choice from the first, and how Tommy Thomas with his indestructible story of the trip upriver with Brandy Shannon, had confirmed my belief along that line.

"Um! He's a breed, this Thomas? It's always a safe rule to disregard at least half of what they tell you. But Duncan, now; what set you on him in the first place? May be following a herring there, do you see? Who gave you the first hint of him—what incident?"

I had been afraid he would pick on that point, and that my reasons would seem pretty lame to him. Still, I admitted that I had settled on Duncan originally by the process of elimination. It wasn't anyone else.

The Inspector nodded approval. "Practically a faultless method. If only you haven't dropped an item in working out your conclusion."

I thought I hadn't but Old Fury thought we'd rehearse and make sure. So for a solid hour I named over the inhabitants of the Landing and its

environs, to the limits of my detachment. We kept to the whites, of course, he agreeing that a white man was certainly the directing genius of the scheme. I went up the street and down on the other side, while he checked them off with his pipe-stem on the palm of his hand and asked questions. Hundreds of questions; where they lived, who they were, what they did and when? Like the old pointer he was, working the cover hurriedly, with a keen and accurate nose to the ground. Finally I stopped; the list was exhausted.

"That accounts for everybody in the place?"

"Every one of them, sir, house by house."

"Um—there's an error here. This place above town on the right of the trail; you didn't mention it. Smoke coming out of there as we passed, and I heard a dog barking. Didn't sound like an Indian dog."

"You're right, sir; that's a big hound. He belongs to an old white woman who lives there alone. I'd forgotten her."

"Well, who is she? What about her?"

"Madame Gerard, she's called, and that may be her name. There's nothing about her, sir; she's a kind of recluse. Has had nothing whatever to do with anyone since she came here. That was five or six years ago, I understand. There are weeks at a time when nobody sees her and she never has visitors. Simply lives there and minds her own business."

The Inspector was thoughtfully twisting his

mustaches into tighter spirals. "Chop her own wood?" he asked.

"No, sir, she has some of the Indians get in a few cords for her every fall."

"Who hauls in her grubstake?"

I didn't know but supposed that some Indian did that. Old Fury got out pencil and notebook and wrote down her name. "It'll do for some club-foot at Headquarters to practice on. Might be more to it than appears. However, Constable, I imagine you have the matter properly lined up. It's been devilishly clever from first to last; probably Duncan's our man as you say. Now about this other racket; this theft case? His daughter, wasn't it, that lost a valuable fur coat?"

I rehashed the whole circumstance of the dance, including my presence there till late in the evening, my talk with Wallis and seeing another person across the street in the darkness.

"I had the notion, afterward, that it might have been Wallis' man Malotte. Especially when I learned that he pulled out of here in the night with a parcel of some kind in his pack-sack. That's why I asked to have them both observed."

The Inspector shook his head. "Not him. I know young Henry Wallis well. Knew his father before him; my officer commanding for a time in South Africa. It's out of the question. Besides, the lad came straight to me when he got to Edmonton. He was in quite a huff, too, at your methods."

"But his Indian took something away with him, sir, under curious circumstances. Couldn't they have stowed it away before your office got hold of him? I've no idea Wallis stole it with any intention of profiting but I do happen to know he was interested in the girl and wasn't making headway. He might have done it for deviltry, mightn't he?"

"No. He told me about the thing his Indian brought out. It was a raw skin; a musk-oxen calfskin. He took me to a furrier's place where it was being made into a lady's coat. He was presenting it to someone, he said. Beautiful thing, too!"

I sat up and batted my eyes. Here was a whole lapful of information at once. Wallis had had one of those skins, but it was already in Edmonton when Captain Duncan had sent Brandy and Tommy Thomas up the river to get it! The Inspector noticed me gaping and asked what about it? I told him the whole yarn as I got it from Tommy except I didn't mention the other five cases that went on with the breed to the mouth of the Pembina. He would hear of that, in time.

"And a funny part is, sir, the Duncan girl is wearing such a coat and the old Captain claims to have had it sent in to her as a present."

"Um—nothing funny about that! Duncan's a liar and he's merely telling his story first, in case Wallis should turn him up to us. Simple as anything. And about the stolen coat—forget it."

"Forget it, sir? He's posted a reward for it and I understand Headquarters was notified."

"I know," the Inspector agreed. "But just forget it. Nobody will get that reward, and the coat will turn up in time."

"But I don't see—"

Old Fury began to get red around the gills. "Blast it! Think, won't you? Just think for a minute. Use your process of elimination on this case. Who, that was not at the dance, could have done it? Well?"

"There would be only the breed, Malotte, and Captain Duncan himself, sir."

"And the breed didn't steal it, so you have the answer—Duncan! You've had it all along, only you wouldn't accept it. Perfectly clear that he stole it. Maybe the daughter knew of it or maybe not; it doesn't matter to us. He has put you on the defensive ever since and means to keep you there. Had you worrying about this coat, hasn't he?"

I admitted that the theft had occupied me more or less.

"Certainly! Just what he wanted. Meantime, he's probably gone ahead with his liquor business."

I could see just then why he was an Inspector and I was a Constable. That was exactly where each of us belonged. And now I could confine myself again to straightforward Police work of the kind that suited me; running down lost horses, searching loads of freight for chance over-supplies of liquor, preserving the peace, warning the Indians about keeping their dogs off the main street

and just being the Lynch I had always been! Nothing to worry over now except catching old Duncan, as before.

My unconcealed pride in Old Fury so pleased him that he offered to make Headquarters tighten up their lookout on the Edmonton end and try to stop Duncan's supply before it started. With this promise and a gruff warning to me about putting on too much weight during the winter months, the Inspector returned to Edmonton. I made no mention of the plan for collaborating with Malcolm Fraser to earn myself a promotion. It hardly seemed the proper occasion.

XXI

Then, as if from having been cussed out and brought to heel and patted on the back and generally overhauled, I began to get lucky all at once. Things broke my way as easily as they had been breaking the other way. First of all, Captain Duncan and Isabella took the stage for Edmonton one morning. They would be gone a week or more, Halliday explained; Isabella to shop and the Captain to order stock for his trading post. He had never done that before during my time in the Landing, but it was all right with me. Brandy Shannon would be in charge of the post with Tommy Thomas to swamp and run errands for him. An interesting situation from my side of it.

I had not searched the Duncan post through fear of warning the Captain of my suspicions. And the Inspector had agreed that probably nothing would be found in the place if I did. But just the same, it was worth while to make certain if the chance arose. I fell to wondering what kind of an accident could be made to happen to Brandy Shannon. And that night, Tommy Thomas appeared, like an answer to prayer.

He slipped into the door of my place very mysteriously and stood back in the shadows till I had the windows covered. Then he wanted to know

how much the law would charge him for shooting somebody. Not to shoot them hard but just easy, like in the pants, maybe. I gathered that if the price should not prove outrageous, Tommy had in mind to commit "assault with intent to do bodily harm" on someone. It was his sense of thrift as well as consideration for the consequences that prompted him to ask. I quoted the established prices for everything from murder down to disturbing the peace—in single lots with certain discounts for extreme provocation and other mitigating circumstances. While he was debating his selection, I got to the cause of his bloodthirstiness.

It appeared that Brandy Shannon had that day sent Tommy on an errand to Sawridge, a good two days' travel up the river. He was given a letter to a certain Indian; an Indian that Tommy claimed did not exist and wouldn't be able to read a letter if he did. Tommy admitted that he had been en route for two hours, darn fool that he was, before the truth of it occurred to him. Thereupon, remembering that Mr. Lynch was his friend and had not hit him in the nose that time, besides giving him the box of pills that made his head swim better than whisky, why, he had turned back and come to me with his problem. What did I think? Wasn't it him, Tommy Thomas, that was married regular to Annie? And bought all the grub and even shoes for her? Yes, Mr. Lynch, and given her money, besides what she took out of his pockets two times, and once when she sold a pup for cash and then

kept it. Didn't I think somebody like Brandy Shannon gotta look out?

I agreed with Tommy that he was at least entitled to feel injured financially if not otherwise. He was partially supporting the big Annie and as her legal lord and master, he had a right to put his foot down at goings-on of any sort. But better than incurring the risk and inconvenience of getting himself hung for murder, he should leave it to me. I had a fancy that this situation could be turned to good account in more ways than one. So I instructed Tommy to make himself at home anywhere but on my bed, while I made a survey of the neighborhood of the proposed crime. As a piece of brilliant forethought I took an old white blanket to put down in case I had to crouch in the snow and wait.

It was dark when I got outside, at least as dark as the nights ever get in that latitude, and I trotted up the trail to Duncan's place. Finding suitable cover in which to hide was not so easy as it had been in summer when the leaves blotted the outlines of everything, but I made shift with a thick willow clump not far from where I had hidden myself once before. As it happened I had not long to wait. I had barely begun to think I was a fool not to have posted Tommy there with orders to report to me occasionally, when Brandy put out his lights.

I had an excellent view of the front door and it was no time till it opened quietly and Brandy ap-

peared. He closed it behind him and after locking it I saw him raise an arm above his head as if feeling along the log wall. Wise Brandy, he was hiding his key. He strolled casually across the road toward me and stepping out of sight from the road, he stopped and waited a few minutes. No doubt he was listening for sounds of anyone moving about in the neighborhood, for presently he turned back to the road again and set off briskly in the direction of Tommy Thomas' cabin. Since it was the one nearest to Duncan's place I had no difficulty in following him close enough to see him let himself in there.

With that I was confronted with the necessity of making a decision. Should I now rush back and inform the presumably injured husband, Tommy Thomas, of the truth of his suspicions and bring him to confront the pair? Then, later, on the strength of my knowledge and his complaint, make an example of them to the end that justice and morality and the sacred unity of the home might be preserved against the philanderings of such whelps as Brandy Shannon? Should I embrace this one of the many forms that Duty wore, or should I ignore the implication of what I had witnessed and salute that face of Duty which smiled in the direction I wanted to go—toward credit and promotion and a berth in some real town? It was a tormenting problem and I wrestled with it in the light of such conscience as I possessed, for at least a full second. Then truth came to me.

An eye-witness would have seen action in the next fifteen minutes. A medium-stout Constable of Mounted Police would have been glimpsed running back down the road to his barracks and addressing himself earnestly to the matter of speed in the performance. I had answered the summons of that gracious duty who wore stripes upon her arms. I didn't count them, but I hoped there would be at least three when I had another vision of her. Besides, I told myself, the most Tommy Thomas could know wouldn't add to what he already suspected. After all, there might be another side to it. I couldn't imagine one at the moment but I meant to be charitable. Anyhow, life was like that; if it hadn't been Brandy and Annie, it might well have been somebody else. God knew we were only weak mortals . . . a man was a man for a' that . . . probably as much could be said of a woman. I didn't know! How could I? I had lived . . . yes, and erred too . . . looked on evil without blanching . . . who was I to judge? . . . There was a quotation . . . what was it now? . . . ninety-and-nine that safely strayed . . . for every one that gets caught? . . . didn't sound like the one I meant . . . law wasn't clear anyway . . . maintaining nuisances . . . disorderly premises . . . man's own judgment . . . all he could follow . . . do as he'd be done by. . . .

No doubt I would have reached an even broader view of it than that if I hadn't got too short-winded to think any further. I felt entirely jus-

tified as it was, and I was back in fifteen minutes with the thing I went for. When the beating of my heart had subsided I stole forward toward Tommy's house, sliding my feet very carefully to avoid crunching the snow under them. There was a moment of thanksgiving that Tommy Thomas, being a semi-professional breeder of dogs, with some pride in his calling, had penned his brutes well away from the house so that I did not arouse them. Yet, for all I knew, it might have been Annie who made this provision and for reasons best known to herself. It didn't seem like Tommy after all. It only remained to make certain my bird was still in the trap. I listened a moment and was reassured when a faint, ticklish giggle sounded beyond the door. All was well. I fitted the iron hasp on Tommy's door gently astride the staple and hooked in the heavy padlock and snapped it shut.

It was a good stout door and Tommy had traded a pup for that padlock. And I remembered that nobody very big was gonna crawl through the window sure. Brandy Shannon was a lumpy figure of a man with barely room inside his shirt for the shoulders he had. I stole considerately away.

My luck was staying by me; Brandy had done better than hide his key above the door. He left a whole ring of them, a dozen or more keys of all sizes. I found a lantern in the basement and by wrapping a sack around most of the globe, it made a fair bull's-eye. The search itself was a great satisfaction to me. Just like feeling in a pocket and

finding your money where you expected. I did not find any liquor, which spoke well for our deductions of the Duncan's method. And I did find Isabella's coat, hanging safely in a tight closet in a corner of the Captain's bedroom. The closet was locked but I found a key to open it. I would write Old Fury about that, I decided; lay it on thick and he'd feel a tenderness toward me because of it.

For a minute I considered stealing the coat from Duncan, just to put him on the anxious seat a while. If I had thought Brandy Shannon could be released again without ever knowing he had been locked up, no doubt I'd have taken the coat away with me. It would have brought on a ruction between Duncan and Brandy and I stood to gain by that: discord in the enemy's ranks would weaken him. But Brandy had been interned for an hour and must have discovered the fact by then. It was my intention to have Tommy release the prisoners and if the coat was missing he might get blamed for it. Tommy was not a strong character at best and under pressure he might be made to tell more than he knew. I left the coat and compromised by taking a glass of good fruity port from a bottle I found in the kitchen. The coat being hidden in the Captain's room indicated that Isabella knew nothing of it. Somehow the inference pleased me, probably on Halliday's account.

There was one lock that defied me; no key on the ring would open the drawer of the Captain's wide desk. That would be where the famous log-book

was kept, no doubt, but there was nothing I could do except take a hand-axe to the thing and that was out of the question. It wasn't a dull evening by any means. I put the keys back where Brandy had hidden them and went home.

Tommy Thomas was fast asleep on the floor behind my stove, and I hadn't the heart to waken him. Tomorrow was always soon enough, I thought, for a man to remember his troubles.

XXII

My report to the Inspector O'Neill would have served as a model for other aspiring Constables. It was meant to leave no doubt in the old boy's mind that he was a master of criminology and that I was voting him the palm for it. And he wouldn't be human, I thought, if he failed to appreciate my true worth after reading it. There only remained to discover Duncan's cache and my days of slavery and obscurity would be over.

Malcolm came to report that his Indian spy was satisfied that Duncan had gone to Edmonton to arrange for liquor to be sent in. Even now, Malcolm assured me, his man was devising a plan for locating it and I would be tipped off the moment it was in Duncan's hands. I was to hold myself in readiness as before, and what did the old Inspector want when he was here?

"Official business," I explained.

Malcolm said, aye, he kenned it would be that. The O'Neill had paid him a visit while waiting for me to return. That one comprehended the position a factor occupied in a community and was not above making use of their good will in Police affairs. "And as for the coat that was stolen fra' the lass,—did I no say the reward wouldna' be claimed? Did I not? 'Twas my agent first suggested the truth of matters to me."

Oh, Malcolm, he was the wise one; he'd known that Duncan did it from the first. Now he was openly on my side, it was certain the end was in sight.

There was only Halliday and Isabella to be thought of. Their love affair must be settled and out of the way before the blow-up of old Duncan took place. I decided to be firm with Halliday. Meantime, the Duncans having returned, it was not so easy to find him disengaged. He called regularly every other night now, and oftener if there was the least excuse. I met Isabella on the street and asked, by way of being fresh, if she had bought herself a trousseau while she was outside. She pretended to think I was proposing and said, "But Constable, I didn't know you cared!"

I said of course I did and that I wanted to see her married and settled down so I could think of something else. About clothes, she said a wise maiden always kept on hand a few things fit to get married in. And what else could a poor girl do but make ready and wait for the lightning to strike her? There was not much to be learned by talking to her.

Halliday was a little better when I finally got his attention by going to his place.

"Look here," I said, "don't think I am overdoing a good thing but I must talk to you confidentially."

Why, that was all right and go ahead. What did I want to talk about?

"About some of your business, really. Your matrimonial prospects; is anything settled yet?"

He had a good laugh over that. "My dear Constable, you are really serious, aren't you? I'm afraid you're an incurable matchmaker. Still I can understand—"

"No, you can't," I barked. "That understanding racket has been worked to death. See if you can take some good advice at its face value without explaining it to shreds. Sometimes I think you'd rather explain a situation away than face it!"

He sat up at that and asked very gravely if it wasn't generally optional whether one took another's advice or not.

"But what's the use of having a friend's interest if you can't be moved by it sometimes?"

Halliday hoped that I would be sufficiently detached to see his meaning clearly, but he felt that even the influence of friends could be dangerous. Not really dangerous, perhaps, but distracting. As he saw it, a man had finally to live his own life; to follow the course laid out by his inner perceptions, his knowledge of what he felt himself to be, and what he hoped to become. One could be mistaken, of course—the path of life was strewn with errors—but one could only hold the vision of his ideal before him and in the last sense, abjure the counsels of friends and foes alike. It was a patient business, this building of character and soul, and done in the solitude of one's own self. Friends might help or enemies seek to hinder, but it was the

builder himself who had finally to lay the stones.

He did so hope I understood! Disparaging my friendly interest was furthest from his thoughts. But I must be a generous friend and let him use or reject of my help as he saw fit. What he meant was, that as friends we made use of and admired only the things in each other that appealed to us, and disregarded the rest. We two and Captain Duncan illustrated it; he was friends to both the Captain and me, yet we had no use for each other.

"Oh, blast old Duncan! It's only that I don't want to see him make a monkey of you! Anyway, I don't want to tinker with your character or soul; I want to give you a tip that you ought to have."

He couldn't imagine in what connection but he'd be glad to hear it.

"Briefly, you ought to get busy with this personal ambition to be the Captain's son-in-law. The engagement ought to be understood and announced. Right away, I mean!"

"Really, Constable—"

"Yes, really!" I put in. "You've let one fool thing after another put you off too long. Now there's a real disturbance about to break that will affect everybody concerned. It's hanging right over your head, if you'd only see it. I can't give you the particulars—you'd understand that of course. But get on with it! Have the matter fixed up while you can."

"But, Constable, it's quite satisfactory as it is. At least our understanding is there, even if it hasn't

been actually discussed. I told you that, I think."

"Yes, you did. And why don't you discuss it? How do you know the girl is waiting for you to declare yourself? She might not feel so certain of herself as you do of her."

"Oh, but she does! I can't tell how I am so sure of it, but I am. Things that I see and hear, have satisfied me on that point. It isn't likely, you know, that I would have been deluding myself all this time. I have sisters, Constable; girls are not exactly mysteries to me."

"Maybe not! But Isabella has no brothers and she might not run true to form. I don't get you—to be satisfied with a guess instead of knowing the answer."

"I'm not guessing, though this whole discussion is absurd."

"Well, what signs are they that tell you which way the wind blows? Or have you only dreamed them?"

He looked at me solemnly as if debating some profound problem in connection with me. "I have no right to tell you these things . . . under ordinary circumstances one would be a swine to do so. I am trusting to your manhood and good taste not to repeat them of course."

"Go ahead," I invited. "It would take more than a bale of straw to break this camel's back. What happened?"

It was in connection with her recent trip to Edmonton, he said. What did I imagine she had gone

out for? To shop, I supposed. Yes. And she had brought back such stores of beautiful things and displayed them for his approval. Apparel, chiefly, er—intimate things, such as ladies wore. He shouldn't be telling it, really, but she had admitted that some of it would be kept to be married in. That was just one instance out of many but it should be enough to satisfy me. I understood perfectly that no girl, well-bred as Isabella, would think of doing that except with the man she loved. There had been one rather daring scene, I gathered, when Isabella slipped into her room and reappeared for a moment wearing what was probably a night-gown, though Halliday called it by a French name. He explained that she had merely slipped it on over her clothes, of course.

Of course! This was all-important if it meant anything at all. But suppose it didn't? "Well, why twitter around with guessing when you can ask and find out the truth? And don't wait any longer about that coat. I'll see she gets it in time for a wedding present."

He wanted to know what that meant and I told him that we had the coat located and were only laying back to grab the man who stole it. He was not to say a word to the Duncans just yet, "So that needn't hold you up any longer. Go right ahead with your arrangements."

Halliday smiled. "I ought to tell you, perhaps, that I had already decided to do so."

"Fine!" I exclaimed. "Let me know first thing so I can congratulate you."

That was a load taken off my mind. I counted him as being one of those thorough ones that would go right ahead once he had started. Of course I expected him to drop a hint about Isabella's coat being found. That would puzzle the Captain a little or else make him believe that the Police were fools. It didn't matter which, everything was coming my way now.

It was the second day after when I saw him again at supper in Louis' dining room. Before I could ask if everything was over, he headed me off by flipping a telegram across to me. He said: "That came in just as I was closing up. Stop and sign for it sometime, won't you?"

My message was from the Inspector and when I got back to the barracks and decoded it, I nearly fell out of my chair. Madame Gerard! It said in substance, that I was to make an immediate search of her premises; that some eight cases of the forbidden fluid had been traced to a freighter who hauled supplies for her a week before. Who in Sam Hill, I asked myself, would have picked on her to be mixed in a game of that kind? Who but Old Fury, that is?

Some explanation should probably be given of Madame Gerard and her relation to the rest of the people in Athabasca Landing. The fact is, she had no such relation; none at all. She lived there above the village with the green forest of spruce

shutting her cabin most out of sight from everyone. And that was all that anyone could say positively about her. There was a story of course, and it was passed on to new-comers who inquired. But even it gave little information concerning the lady herself. Louis Papineau had related it to me and for that reason I had kept it labeled as doubtful in my mind.

It seems the first that was known of her was when she moved into the little cabin that had been previously built there. The advent into the community of a woman, presumably less than sixty years of age, was enough to create a considerable stir of interest among the inhabitants. But when, after a decent interval, Madame Gerard had made no public appearance on the street, to shop or ask for mail, or simply to be looked over, then guesses and suppositions began to circulate. Must be something wrong, uh? And when the wife of the Anglican missionary went to call and failed to gain audience with more than the woman's great dog, chained at her door, then gossip really began to buzz. Such women as Tim Wade's wife admitted that they had not been fooled from the first; she was probably one of those thus and so creatures.

Her reputation had thereby grown lurid through the hearsay testimony of the openly virtuous ones and was finally accepted by the more doubtful remainder of local society. Most any man in the place would have told you in strict confidence, and

with knowing looks, that such and such was true. And strict honesty would have compelled him to admit that, so far as his personal knowledge went, he was a liar. Madame Gerard had remained ignorant of all this and continued to live in the closest enjoyment of her own society and that of the oversized Great Dane dog that guarded her. Only once in the six years had she figured in any incident that became generally known in the Landing.

The story is that on this occasion a certain lecherous teamster, hearing these rumors and innuendoes passed back and forth, and being inspired by a phoney courage as the result of drinking from too many bottles, had declared his intention of settling the truth of matters, once and for all. It fatigued him greatly, he said, that so much smoke should be in evidence and the amount of fire remain indefinite. He would go up and take the dog bare-handed, man-fashion, and then—he'd see what he'd see. The trial and error method. A report of his findings would be published in due course.

This proved however to be unnecessary. He reappeared almost immediately exhibiting the neat hole where a rifle bullet had burrowed its way through his overalls and the meaty portion of his thigh. It was generally held from this evidence that the ghost of slander and libel concerning the woman had been effectively laid. And Louis Papineau, recognizing the public debt, had given

eight dollars to head a subscription list toward compensating the teamster.

The object lesson was not lost on the thoughtful element in Athabasca Landing. The Madame Gerard remained an outcast and an alien, it is true, by reason of the passion she displayed for minding her own business, but she was no longer a disreputable one. She continued as before, to be with them but not of them, and her sole contact with the community thereafter lay in her ownership of the dog. It was this splendid beast whose offices Tommy Thomas had been surreptitiously procuring to father the succession of pups on which Tommy's reputation rested. And my knowledge of this fact was the basis of the influence I wielded over Tommy Thomas.

Such was Madame Cecile Gerard—according to Ed Patten who surrendered her mail on the order of a small Indian boy who called for it every week.

And now here was the Inspector, Jerry O'Neill, reaching out into the dark and plucking a red-hot tip that bid fair to give a very reasonable explanation for all the mystery and isolation with which the strange woman had been surrounded. Booze! Through some trusty Indian, no doubt, she had been quietly carrying on a business all these years. It might develop that Duncan had been getting credit for a lot of hell he never raised, Malcolm Fraser and his dreadful tale of corruption and bribery to the contrary notwithstanding. I regretted that possibility; it meant the waste of

such a fine lot of suspicions. But the Inspector would be pleased to the point of bursting at this neat piece of work on his part and so far from thinking me dumb for not having seen it myself, he'd be grateful to me for the chance to show off. Three stripes would be the least I'd get.

Bright and early next morning I went up to Madame Gerard's cabin and gave it a thorough searching. That was all I did, just search it. The Inspector's tip turned out a bloomer. I found three or four bottles of liquor of some kind, but she had a permit two years old that covered them. Undoubtedly there was something fishy about the whole deal. As there was about the woman herself, when I met her.

That was after I got past the dog, of course. He was rigged on a long chain and this chain in turn traveled on a heavy wire fastened along one side of the cabin. This enabled the big bruiser to cover either door, front or back, as the occasion required. And judging by the way the snow was packed down, he had been doing lots of practicing. As I walked up to the place, he let out a noise about halfway between a fog-horn and the bellow of a bull. He came to the end of his chain full tilt. I waited to see if his collar was going to hold and then I hailed the house. Nobody answered and this big pie-bald hound stood up on his hind feet and called me every dirty name he could think of. Beyond any question he was a meat-eater, and his choice seemed to be somewhere on the thick of

my leg. I was in uniform and we'd been taught that when the sight of it wasn't enough, we were to take measures. I took a good stout length of birch sapling and was getting set to knock him clear around the house when somebody spoke and he stepped back and smiled an apology.

Madame Gerard was standing in the door and I saw that all my ideas regarding her were about to be revised. From seeing her at a distance I had got the impression that she was middle-aged or worse, rather frowsy and difficult to look at. I was not prepared for this handsome, well-dressed and fully-corseted person who met me at the door. It embarrassed me somewhat when I told her my business. Probably because she was good-looking.

She merely lifted her brows a little and with a gesture invited me to help myself. While I was about it, she went back to her chair by the south window and took up a book and continued to read it. Read all the time I was there, too! After I had fanned the place and was ready to go, I tried to say something about being sorry for the mistake. She looked up from her book to listen politely and then asked me to close the door when I went out. She was cool about it; entirely too cool to be quite natural. Most people would have been either nervous or defiant, or just plain indignant, depending on whether they stood to get caught with anything or not. But not she! I didn't resent finding nothing in her place, understand, but I did feel that she might have been more

disturbed over it. Anyone would have thought she was used to having her house searched and had been expecting me.

I wired the Inspector, letting him down as gently as possible, suggesting the stuff might have been transferred to some other load en route. Halliday read the message which was all in code except the words "Madame Gerard" as the Inspector's message had been.

"What about this Madame Gerard?" he asked. "She seems to be quite a mystery."

"She is all of that," I told him and thought no more about it.

Malcolm Fraser met me on the street next day and offered me his sympathy.

"Keep it," I said. "Why are you sympathizing with me?"

"For bein' led astray in yer search of yon woman's cabin. I could ha' told ye nothing would come of it. My Indian, ye understand, he keeps me advised of things. A very exceptional man."

"He must be," I snapped. "I suppose it was him tipped her off I was coming, was it?"

"Not at all!" Malcolm was calm and patient with me. "'Twas only that he had previous knowledge that her freighter was to be involved. It has gone through, the goods ye were seeking. My man is away now, discovering its destination upriver. Ye will be advised shortly; ye or the Corporal Egan at Grouard. Whichever seems best,"

he added complacently. "My agent will report in a day or two, Constable."

I gave him a few sarcastic "poohs!" for his old agent, but there was little satisfaction in it. Malcolm had got hold of the sort of man I should have had and I could not deny it. Tommy Thomas wanted to be spoken to and encouraged to greater activity. His services were showing a loss to me, little as I was paying for them.

That night when I went to look for him, Tommy was not to be found; he had dropped in at the barracks a few days before to tell me of the fine deal he made with Brandy Shannon before letting him out of his cabin on the morning after I had locked him in. In fact, Tommy was trying to sell me a new rifle that he got among other things at the time. Now, I supposed he was off on a trip to celebrate his luck or find a buyer for some of his loot. In the hope of finding Annie I stopped in at Duncan's post and chinned with Brandy Shannon. He looked considerably older than when I had seen him last, as if his years were bearing on him.

"Where's Annie?" I finally asked.

"She's away an' all! Left him, I understand, an' gone back till her mother's people. Yis, to Lac LaBische, I believe she's gone an' left the scut! Ut serves him right. She was the good girrul, workin' stiddy for Miss Ishbel and makin' her few dollars iver week and him not appreciatin' her, the swab! I know nothin' of the matter at all, Mr. Lynch,

savin' it's been mentioned. 'Tis like he'll be goin' to try an' injooce her back to 'im again. The hathen swine! I never liked 'im at all, Mr. Lynch."

Whether that had always been true or not, it was probably true now. But I doubted that Tommy had gone very far to get Annie back to him. He had told me that he and Annie were not talking together any more since the last time. More likely he was dead-heading about among his friends and bragging of his new-found wealth.

I waited for Halliday at supper that night but he didn't show up; dining with the Duncans again. Louis dished up my rations and later he passed through the dining room with a loaded tray in his hands. I wondered who could be eating supper in his room and thought of Wallis at once. Louis' old beer tray had not been in evidence except on two or three occasions when Wallis was there. But it wouldn't be him, I thought; he would be at his place of business away beyond the Peace. A man couldn't jump around the six or eight hundred miles very often in a winter and have time for anything else. Not even Wallis.

Going back to my barracks after supper, I stumbled against something, a large bundle, seemingly, just outside of my door. It was too dark to make it out so I carried the thing inside and lit my lamp for a look at it. Isabella's stolen coat! Naturally. The wise old Duncan had had the thing bundled up and left at my door, knowing I

could not fail to recognize it. Knowing too, that I would have no choice but to return it with that explanation—or such other as I chose to make.

But what, I wondered, had been his reason? This was going to cost him the two-fifty reward he'd posted as sure as I was Lynch. He couldn't play ducks and drakes with me. Probably he had not counted on that. I sat down and abandoned myself to intensive thinking for several minutes and at the end of that time, I had worked out two or three points. First, old Duncan would certainly have a particular reason for ditching the coat to me all at once; something had happened or was going to happen. He stole it in the first place, to divert my attention from him and throw suspicion on Wallis. That occurred on the very night Wallis reappeared at the dance. Good! Then what?

Just there I bumped into a hunch. And in five minutes I was in Papineau's hotel interviewing him about the guest that had eaten in his room. It was Wallis all right; Louis admitted it after I had convinced him that he stood in danger of personal injury unless he told. It was a tough choice for Louis, since Wallis had promised to break all his bones if he did. He would take a chance on me, he decided, seeing Wallis had not brought Malotte this time and I could certainly do more damage than Wallis alone. This stood as a kind of tribute to me.

Duncan's reason for passing the coat was clear

then; Wallis was back in the Landing and probably the old Captain knew it. The coat turning up so mysteriously would serve to confirm my suspicions of him or at least make me discredit anything Wallis might say about Duncan and his liquor business. This was simply a further move to pull Wallis' cork. It was all very catty and clever of Duncan and except for my having seen the coat in his closet, it would have been a sweet scheme. Duncan didn't know I had seen it.

My night-prowling expeditions had been so fruitful on the other two occasions, that I picked up the old blanket and set out to try it again. From the same willow cluster, that had served me before, I commanded a view of Duncan's place. And by stamping softly and wriggling my toes, I managed to keep circulation going as I waited. It was not long till the front door opened and Brandy Shannon came out. He set off along the road to town and much as I wanted to trail him, I was afraid he would see me doing it.

I was still wondering what he might be up to when he came back. Snooping around my barracks, I supposed. Presently the door opened again and Halliday came out; I had forgotten that he would be there. He pulled his mackinaw tight around him and trotted off briskly toward the village. Everything must be all settled with him; straightforward, persistent Halliday, he wouldn't be hurried and he wouldn't be stopped. For a moment I almost envied him the kind of mind he

had and the things soon to be added to him. A beautiful young wife with lots of father's money and some of father's brains—a business of his own and a place in the world.

Sounds coming from the Duncan post interrupted my reflections. Doors banging shut, the movement of people inside and voices, all these came distinctly through the still, cold air. I could not make out what was being said though the Captain's heavy voice was audible, raised somewhat in speech and holding forth at length. He must have been addressing Isabella but whatever he said certainly didn't take. I heard her interrupt him by laughing—a high clear burst that carried defiance and mockery in it. There were doings of some kind there!

A door had slammed shortly after Isabella's laughter and the house became curiously quiet. Some of the lighted windows on the side nearest me went dark but I hung on, shivering and wondering if that was to be all. But just as I was about to crawl out of my cover, the door opened again. Very quietly, this time, and at first I could see nothing under the shadow of the porch. Then I made out two figures, the Captain Duncan and Brandy Shannon, facing each other against the faint light of the sky. I strained to hear if anything was being said, but if so it was whispered. The Captain's hand lifted and rested a moment on Brandy's shoulder—a curious gesture of benediction. At once Brandy turned back inside, shut-

ting the door behind him. Captain Duncan walked directly across the road and entered the footpath that began just there. He passed within a dozen yards of me but looked neither right nor left; he was going somewhere and had only that on his mind. Just where, I wondered? This path ambled across lots and touched the main street above the village proper, at the back yard of the missions, to be exact. Captain Duncan was never going to church at eleven o'clock at night! I gathered up my blanket and stepped into the path behind him.

Frozen snow is awkward stuff to have under foot when a job of stalking is to be done, but by starting while he was still close to me I managed. His footsteps sounded clear as they crushed the snow. I marked the beats till I got in step with him and then it was easy. I could walk up as close to him as I pleased so long as I kept in step. The noise of his feet would cover the noise of mine, unless he should stop suddenly. He didn't though, and I followed him, neat as anything, right to his destination.

This path had forks and branches in abundance, made by Indian ponies wandering back and forth in summer, and the women rustling dead poplar and willow for their hand-to-mouth supply of winter firewood. The Captain took one of these forks and we skirted round the missions and came out—at Madame Gerard's back door! I was close enough to see her dog come lumbering out against

his chain. He didn't bark, but threw conniption fits of pleasure. Captain Duncan was a friend of the family there.

I didn't stop to figure out the meaning of this. But on the way back to the village I saw that it meant several things. There was something between the Captain and the mysterious Madame Gerard, and there had been all these years, if only people had known it. That path to her back door was well-worn by travel. Her place would be the dump for the liquor supply since it was close to the road and a team could stop there the few minutes necessary to unload a half-dozen cases and then come on in with an innocent load for Malcolm, or the French people, or anyone. There would be a dozen freighters ready to take such a chance, I knew. From her place it was probably packed case at a time in the night, to Duncan's. Fine! Then why hadn't I found that lot the Inspector wired me about? I had been through both places, presumably since it left Edmonton in her grubstake. Malcolm had said this lot went on through the Landing, but how did he know? Malcolm and his agent! They were as apt to be full of prunes as anyone else.

My inclination was to think that the woman had been warned. Yes, that was it. And the stuff was packed down to Duncan's before I searched her place. But who had warned her? Malcolm had said his agent knew that her freighter would be suspected. I doubted he knew any such thing,

whoever he was. It sounded too confounded deep for any Indian to dope out alone. There was only one other person who could have known of the search beforehand—Halliday. I got very wild just then at the notion that he might have been fooling me all along with his sweetness and light, while he was standing in with the Captain. I hardly believed it but I had a bad few minutes over the possibility. Anyway, I could find out mighty quick.

The telegraph office was dark of course when I got back to the street but by banging on Halliday's rear door, I got him up. Once inside with him I went right to the point.

"Look here, did you open your face to anyone about that telegram that came to me?"

He did his utmost to stare indignantly at me. It was a washout though, in that cold room; his teeth chattered and spoiled the effect.

"Sus-certainly not!" he jerked out. "What in heaven's name has come over you, Constable, to think such a thing?"

"Never mind! If you didn't it's all right."

He should have dropped it there, but he couldn't without first showing me how ridiculous I had been.

"How could I know what was in your message? It was in code, wasn't it, all except the woman's name? I know nothing at all about her. Why, I even asked Captain Duncan who she was but I got no answer. It was at dinner that evening. I

merely remembered the name and asked casually. But you needn't think I'd forget myself so far as to mention any message that came through this office!"

"What did he say when you asked about her?"

"He merely said he preferred not to discuss her, and why did I ask. I told him that I'd heard her mentioned recently. And that was all!"

It was plenty! What he had done by that fat-headed remark was to set old Duncan thinking, and I was coming to realize that when the old boy thought, he got somewhere with it. He had tumbled to the truth in a minute. And after this hare-brain went home he and Brandy Shannon had shifted the stuff. Apparently I had been wrong in thinking Halliday had any sense whatever. It beat hell in my opinion, how anybody could spill the beans so nicely and still not do anything I could jump him for.

"You dang fool!" I said. "All you've done is sell me out! You had better brace up and think about your job a little oftener or there will be a new operator in your place one of these days."

"I don't know what it is you imagine I have done, Constable, but so far as this office goes there is to be a new man here anyway. Something tells me I shall have an announcement to make in a day or two."

"Yes? Well, don't count too much on 'something' being right! And look out for a big dark man with whiskers."

A team and sleigh passed along the street as I came from behind the telegraph office; a team outbound toward Edmonton with the horses trotting briskly to the jingling of their harness. Somebody pulling out in the night—Wallis maybe, rushing back for something else he had forgotten. Or maybe it wasn't him; I couldn't make out if there were one or two people in the sleigh. And I was too occupied with thinking to be more than slightly curious about it. Most of my thinking was yet to be done.

One thing was certain; the stuff would be at Duncan's now. They wouldn't risk caching it outside and Malcolm was crazy as a bedbug about it having gone up the river. Tomorrow I would raid Duncan again, openly, and let him think what he chose, if I failed to find it. But I wouldn't fail. The sign was right for something to happen; that something would be me.

XXIII

It was Judgment Day in Athabasca Landing. From some cause, internal combustion probably, all the uncertainty and guesswork came to a head, and Truth, stark or naked or bald, or whatever its nature is, took charge of things. The sheep and the goats got a permanent separation. Those that were right cashed in heavy on the occasion, and those that were wrong had to go chase themselves. Nearly everyone I have mentioned got his measure taken before the day was over. I didn't come off so badly myself, even if things did not pan out as I had hoped. A Corporal's job was a little better than a Constable's. At least a little. And certainly that mining town up in the Crow's Nest country was a better detachment than the Landing ever had been. Up to that time, I mean. It may be different now; the place has had a railroad and a real-estate boom and a fire since I was there.

I appeared at the Duncan post about nine o'clock next morning and it seemed at first as if nobody was in the place. The door of the trade-room was unlocked and I shouted and banged on the counter till finally Isabella peeped out of her door to answer.

"Where is your father?" I asked.

She thought for a moment and guessed that her

father was out. So was Brandy Shannon when I asked about him. Just out somewhere.

"What is it you want, Constable? I really couldn't come out now. But if you can find what you want, you may help yourself."

"I'll do that! What I want is probably down in the basement. Mind if I look?"

"Of course not. The stair door is just at the end of the counter, there."

I knew about the stair door. Isabella retired and I closed the trapdoor after me as I went down. This was going to be better than I expected, though it did seem strange that the Captain should be out.

This place of Duncan's, as I have said, was two stories behind and one in front by reason of being built over the edge of the sharp bank that marked the old river channel when the Athabasca had been wider and shallower. Seen from the side, it had the appearance of a large fat man resting on his arms over the edge of a ditch. This lower part was all basement and used for the storage of the stock of goods not on display. In one corner was a strongroom affair of logs where the Captain kept his fur.

I found the lantern where I had found it before and with it lighted I set to work. The place didn't seem to be quite as it had been; every box, package or case was opened so that its contents were exposed. On my other visit, I had been obliged to guess at lots of them or trust the labels on their outsides. In one way it simplified matters to find

everything open but again it looked strange to me. As if someone had expected me to call and wanted me to feel perfectly satisfied when I was done. And maybe be nicely fooled by the innocent appearance of everything. I fooled them, though, by going to the bottom of every packing-case in the lot. The strongroom door was unlocked and I went through it. Nothing there but furs hanging from poles fixed cross-wise.

Not a sign anywhere of the stuff I was hunting. I had been down there maybe half an hour when I heard the front door open and someone came in. The Captain or Brandy, likely. That would be all right, I was about done downstairs and I wanted an escort with keys to accompany me when I went through the upper rooms. Someone was talking with Isabella in her sitting room, but it didn't sound like either of the men. I finished my search and was just raising the trap-door of the stairs when I realized it was Halliday speaking to Isabella. Peeping out with my head on a level with the floor, I could see his feet and legs through the open door of Isabella's room. The rest of him was cut off by her table.

"—know if your father has mentioned it or not," he was saying, "but I concluded my business deal with him last night."

"Why, no!" This from Isabella. "What deal was that?"

"I bought this business! All of it, too. I had

an idea he mightn't care to sell me more than an interest, but he did."

"Isn't that splendid! And now you'll be in the fur trade yourself, won't you? I always did think it was such a fascinating thing to be doing, you know."

As though she had no notion of what he was leading up to! I knew, and I'd never had a proposal in my life. He'd been long enough getting at it, goodness knows, though better late than never. Not for worlds would I have done anything to interrupt them.

"Yes," said Halliday, "and my resignation has gone in so that's done with. It leaves only the most important thing to be considered. Isabella! Can't you imagine why I'm saying all this to you?"

Isabella laughed in the light easy way she had. "Oh, but we are such friends and we have talked of many things! What have you not told me? It is from you that I got my ideals of men—the kind of men that follow the adventurous life in this country. I should have been lost without that. Father is such a stick at understanding people, you know."

"I think you do him an injustice there," he ventured.

Darn it, what did he want to start an argument for! Was he going to stop now and explain her father to her?

"But it wasn't about him that I wanted to talk to you," Halliday closed in. "I hope you under-

stand why I did these other things before speaking—”

Now Isabella had not been standing demurely with her face modestly averted all this time. She was out of my sight but I could hear her footsteps moving back and forth across the room, her voice now near and now indistinct. It made me nervous.

“—before speaking of the thing that means most to me,” Halliday continued earnestly.

But it didn't get over. Isabella cried out: “Oh, look!” from over by the window, and her voice had a high, excited quality in it. “Somebody's coming; driving out this way! Run and see if it is a coach and four. And the driver—I knew it! He wears a scarlet livery with a plume in his cap. I knew it would be that way when it happened. Run, open the door!”

Halliday did not run. He bent over to bring his eyes level with the low window and stared out through it. This made his face visible to me; his mouth was slightly open and it was plain that he neither saw nor understood the reason for her excitement. He straightened up as a rush of sounds came from outside; the frantic jingling of sleigh-bells; horses' hoofs thumping in the snow and the driver pulling them up with loud cries of “Whup! Whup!” They were no more than stopped when someone bounded heavily across the porch and the door burst open with a crash.

“Haiee!” The lusty voice of Louis Papineau bellowed his salutation. I risked a glimpse at him

to see if he was stewed. It was no scarlet livery he wore but a riotous red mackinaw and the plume was merely the tassel of his knitted cap.

"Where dat girl, she's at?" he demanded.

Halliday was standing in the doorway of Isabella's room and he took it upon himself to counter: "Do you mean Miss Duncan, Papineau?"

"Sure! Who do you tink I mean? Where she's at?"

Isabella now appeared and Halliday stood aside. And Isabella, instead of haughtily demanding an explanation of Louis' boisterous conduct, asked quite eagerly: "What did you want of me, Mr. Papineau?"

"Huh, you don't know for why I'm come? Dat Wallis, he say I come. Sure! 'Louis,' he say, 'tellen dat girl I'm ready now for le's get married. She no comin' right now,' he say, 'I gonna stop by dat house an' draggin' away by de hair!' Dat's what he say, M'sieu Wallis. You comin'?"

Isabella's answer was a whoop; nothing more dignified than that. An extravagant outburst of high laughter that was about the last answer to be expected from a girl who had just received a proposal. She turned back into her room, overcome with it, leaving Louis to stand there with a puzzled look on his face. Halliday was faintly greenish around his mouth and I remember wondering if he was holding his breath. The girl had recovered herself and was at the door again in a moment. But she was another person, an out-

raged young fury with her eyes blazing at Papi-neau. She stamped her foot and seemed a head taller than Halliday, standing beside her.

"So! I am to come now, am I? Well, that fine caballero is to learn waiting. He will have much of it to do in future! And you, little man, will stay outside with your horses. Stand at their heads and wait. I will come when I am dressed—and ready."

Ah, she was quality then and Louis knew it! He bowed and smiled, a fearful grimace that parted his face from ear to ear. Then he wheeled round and marched out, closing the door behind him.

I got it all sorted and understood much quicker than Halliday did. But then of course it was not my world that had been destroyed. He followed her back into her room and said, "But, Isabella!" in a strained incredulous voice.

"But what?" she asked. It was plain she had forgotten him; her footsteps hurried about the room, doors and drawers jerked open and shut with decided haste.

"But what?" she repeated.

"You're not—not really going?"

"To be married? Indeed I am! Look!" There was brief silence there. "Did I not say they were to be married in? I thought of course you would understand."

Oh, he had understood too well to need even to question her, the fool! He could understand anything but a fact.

"But surely you don't love this—this Wallis?"

"Not love him! My God, is it from necessity you think I am marrying? Or fear? Drag me away by the hair, indeed! Did that threat frighten you, my friend? Let him only try it! I shall take my mother's tiny dagger. Father is scarred in a dozen places with it, you know! Mother was of the Mondragons and I am like her. The women of the family have always loved pigheaded men. My Enrique is English and no one could be more pigheaded than that, do you think? And I shall prick him with my dagger—probably during our honeymoon. Mother told me the secret of their happiness was her stabbing father. Their reconciliations were divine!"

This was said in snatches while she moved back and forth packing a bag, by the sound.

"And now," she told him, "you must really go. I have to change and do my hair and the great Annie is not here to help me. I shall surely beat her when I have her back."

"But, Isabella!" Halliday burst out. "I can't go. Not till you understand!" The stricken tone of his voice arrested her and brought her to stop in front of him.

"What is it?"

Halliday seemed to be choking but he got it out. "I love you!"

"But of course you do!" she told him.

"I—I hoped it might be me you loved."

"We could have been engaged," Isabella agreed.

"I have never been really engaged except to an utter boy or two. But marrying is so very different, mother said. How could you marry me? My terrible fits of temper would destroy your very soul and make you miserable. And I enjoy them so! My color is never so good as then. My English will love them. He will smile and stare in his cold manner till I am ready to kill him. Then! It will be glorious, I think! So I must preserve my mad tempers, you see, or I am lost. And you could not beat me; now could you?"

"Beat you? No!" Halliday gasped.

"There, you see! My Wallis has promised he will surely do it. I hope so! Between my temper and his brutality, life will not be dull. And now you really must go, my friend. There!" Somebody was swiftly kissed at that and the girl went on. "It would not do to make him too furious with waiting. Not so soon. Time for that when he has come fully under my power!"

Oh, that was the end of his dream for Halliday! What had he to say that would count in the least with a pagan young thing already athrill with the thought of combat and struggle to come? His precious words could not have been more than agreeable sounds to one with blood so hot and turbulent as hers. It would never have done, I saw. In fact most anyone could have seen it then. Even Halliday! Where he had offered a wealth of words and tender sentiments the girl had hungered for the buffets and hurts of real life and was rushing

eagerly toward them. What had he been thinking? A fiery, headlong creature like her to be put off with delicate fancies and such knightly consideration? It was a man she'd wanted—a mean one with some real pig-headedness about him. Wallis would probably qualify; probably he was quite a person, underneath the idiocy he affected. At least her judgment could be trusted in the matter of knowing her own wants.

My meditations were cut short by a thump on the crown that nearly knocked me out. Halliday, groping his way to the Captain's room, had blundered a foot onto the trap-door. And it had been resting on top of my head. I came up from there and went outside where Louis Papineau was standing rigidly in front of his horses. He rolled his eyes sideways at me and grinned but otherwise he didn't move. I stood on the porch and frowned, wondering what I had best do next.

A voice was raised in song somewhere in the wilderness of brush beyond the road and presently Brandy Shannon emerged from the path that led cross-lots to the missions and elsewhere. He approached with what appeared to be a seagoing roll in his gait and stopped to stare at Papineau. The song had stopped but after a prolonged inspection of the team and driver, he finished the verse he had started.

“Oh, th' Captain he was drunk an' the first mate
was a Swede,
An' the Mary Ann she sails tomorra mornin'.”

It was no time to be hearing ribald songs.

"Hey!" I said. "Cut it out and come up here. Where's the Captain?"

When Brandy had managed the steps and halted in front of me, I understood it. He was the worse for liquor. "Where's the Captain," I said.

Brandy swung an arm out wildly.

"Gone! Ever'body's gone. An' I bin seein' 'em off!"

"When did the Captain go?" I demanded.

"Last night, it was. I seen 'em off. Him and th' Madame's gone, Mr. Lynch; gone an' left me behind."

"Both gone, uh?"

"Aye, the both of 'em, Mr. Lynch! 'Tis a turrible blow to me to be siperated apart from th' Captain. Even the little time I'll be stoppin' here. I'm a heart-broke man over th' head of it, Mr. Lynch. He never done it before! Ut's dacint an' kindly of ye to be comin' to see me; I'm touched by ut. An' here's a prisent th' Captain left fer ye. 'See that ye give it him, Shannon,' he says. ' 'Tis little enough av coorse but he's welcome. He was far from bein' a bad sort, at all.' That's what he said, Mr. Lynch."

Brandy pulled a long envelope out of his pocket and gave it to me. Then he went on into the post. I hesitated to open it with Papineau watching me cross-eyed from just below. Still I was curious and there was the thought of two hundred and fifty dollars in my mind. At heart he was prob-

ably a fair sport and would want to leave nothing unsettled behind him. I was fully prepared to think so at least as I ripped open the flap of the envelope. But it was no green sheaf that greeted my eyes. It was black. Jet black. The Captain Duncan's whiskers! The old sucker had shaved off his brush and made me a present of it.

Louis Papineau spoke up: "What's de matter, M'sieu Lynch? De face, she look sick!"

I put Louis in his place and went inside. Brandy Shannon was standing with his feet wide apart, counting a roll of money. His cap was lying on the counter before him and Brandy pulled the bills one at a time from his roll, closed his eyes as he made the addition, then dropped them into the cap.

"Oh, the Mary Ann she sunk, wit th' skipper in his bunk,
An' his missus she collected all his wages."

It was yet another verse of his song. When he had dropped the last bill into his cap I turned him carefully round to face me.

"Look here, Shannon, we Irish must stick together, eh?"

"We could lick th' wurrl'd; th' two av us!" he declared. "Aye, we'll stick together, Mr. Lynch. I got money. Look at ut! We'll go ashore together."

"Later," I said. "First I want you to tell me something. It won't do any harm now your Cap-

tain is gone. It's just for the sake of knowing that I ask. Where is the stuff: the eight cases that came in to the Madame's place? It's unofficial you know. Where is it!"

Brandy puckered his long upper lip and squinted up at me as if weighing my question.

"I'll tell ye!" he said. "In th' first place there was none. Not a drop of anythin', Mr. Lynch! An' if there had been, it wouldn't be at her place whin ye searched it nor here whin ye searched this."

"Where then?"

Brandy jabbed me in the ribs and cackled.

"Ut's a riddle, Mr. Lynch. On'y there was none, ye see!"

"It's no riddle to me now. She was tipped off and the stuff brought down here. Then taken back later, wasn't it? Where is it now?"

He didn't answer but grinned at me and laid a hand over the capful of bills on the counter. I saw it straight then.

"So you've peddled it since last night, have you? Among Indians, Shannon? If I find one of them with even a strong breath, I'll boil you, my boy, and don't you forget it. Friendship ceases right here! You and the skipper got away with plenty as it was. But—"

"Aisy now, Mr. Lynch! Ain't I been sayin' there was none? An' supposin' the' was th' least drop, would I be treacherin' my old frien' to sell th' stuff hereabouts to th' Injuns th' way they'd be reelin' all over th' place? An' him catchin' the

devil an' all, an' maybe gettin' th' Inspector down on 'im again? I would not! If there was any, mind, an' I was foorced to do annythin' wit' it, I'd sell ut to teamsters. Th' poor lads! Ridin' th' long way back to Edmonton in th' turrible cold! 'Tis them I'd spare it to, Mr. Lynch, an' at half price. A bottle or so to each to warrm their poor bellies. Save maybe a wee drop I would give to th' Tommy Thomas. But no more! An' I'd make him put ut inside on th' spot, so I would!"

"Tommy? I thought you were off him for life!"

"'Twas a misunderstandin' we had, Mr. Lynch. A woman came near spoilin' th' friendship between us. But Tommy is th' good lad."

No doubt Brandy would have enlarged on the information he had already given me if we had not been interrupted just then. Isabella came sailing out of her room with a bag in her hand. "Oh, Shannon, I nearly forgot! Did father leave any money for— Ah, I see!" She reached out and impulsively gathered the leafy mass of bills from Brandy's cap. He started to protest but she had stooped and kissed his bare knobby forehead. "Good-bye, Shannon! Mind you take good care of father."

She didn't kiss me but she laid her hand, still clutching the wad of money, against my arm. "Good-bye, Mr. Lynch! And surely I have your blessing?"

"Why not?" I said. "And here—" I shoved the

envelope containing her father's whiskers into the hand that held her bag. "Give that to Wallis from me; it's the increase on something he gave me once. And I have your other coat, you know! You can have it any time."

"Oh, lovely! Father had it all the time, hadn't he?" I nodded.

"Poor father, he was so afraid I should make an unfortunate marriage." Here her eyes glanced toward the room where Halliday had gone. It was such a gesture as one might make to indicate the presence of the dead. "He thought it was necessary to roar at the mention of Mr. Wallis' name. To rouse my interest by opposition, you understand."

I was not sure that I did. But she had said good-bye again and was gone before I could answer. Papineau stood up in the sleigh in front of her and drove from that position. He let out a yell when they were headed back for town and the horses bolted. Thereafter as far as we could see, Louis was bent over the dash of the sleigh belaboring them to still greater speed. As they rounded the bend of the road Isabella flung up an arm in farewell and her call, clear and high, floated back to us. It was her leave-taking, the end of the old life, and somehow it seemed exultant, like a battle-cry.

Brandy Shannon tried a whoop in answer but his voice broke dismally in the middle of it and he turned and rushed inside.

Oh, there were thrills and emotions enough for

everyone, it seemed. Even Halliday was hidden somewhere nursing his tragic share of it. Enough for everyone but me, that is. Being a Policeman I was outside of it all; bound by my calling to remain impersonal, to follow the given order of procedure as an institution and not as a man. That was the hell of it, I thought. I felt like going out and pulling up a tree, just to express myself. But all I could do was to stand there and wonder what I had better do about picking up the pieces.

Tommy Thomas was to be a great help to me in getting a clear understanding of all that had happened. He came wandering out of the brush just opposite, babbling to himself, as I thought. Then I saw that he was leading the Madame Gerard's big dog and it was him Tommy was addressing.

"What are you doing with that dog?" I demanded.

"Huh!" said Tommy. "This dog, she's mine, Mr. Lynch. Captain Duncan, he giving this dog to me."

"How long has Duncan owned him, eh?"

Tommy leaned over and held his hand a foot above the snow. "That long ago," he answered. Since the dog was a pup, I gathered. This was news; I edged up closer to Tommy.

"And how long have you known it, my boy?"

Well, did I remember when Tommy first went to working for the Captain? It was right after that.

"So you've known about him and the Madame all along, have you?"

That was right, Mr. Lynch. Lots of people thought Tommy was some kind of a sucker but he guessed he knew more than they did. Nobody was going to boss him any more, sure. It was no good, Mr. Lynch. Everybody saying you gotta do this or I gonna tell on the pups, you gotta do that or I tell on the pups.

"Who did that, besides me?" I wanted to know.

"That Malcolm Fraser, he done it. What I'm going do, Mr. Lynch, ever'body tryin' to run me ragged when they see I catchin' pups off this dog."

"What about the Captain? Was he in on it too?"

Well, the Captain was all right. He say Tommy you be a good boy and I giving that dog to you some day. And now it was that day. Just Tommy was going to be the boss of that dog now. And boss of himself. He had plenty of money now that damn Annie had run away and he was even with everybody. Malotte would find out she was no good. Sure, that's where Annie had gone—to Malotte. But it was all right with Tommy. He got twenty dollars from the Duncan girl to let Annie go on ahead and be ready to work for her. And Wallis bought three pups at twelve dollars apiece so Tommy wouldn't make any kick and try to get her back again. Malcolm gave him some grub for going up the river to look for booze and the girl gave him ten dollars for the same trip be-

cause he told Wallis at Sawridge to come on and marry her. Wallis had been waiting there all the time maybe, Tommy didn't know. He only knew he wasn't going to answer any more questions. Not for anybody.

"Just answer me this," I requested. "You've been telling Old Duncan everything that went on all this time, haven't you? All that I said or Malcolm said to you?"

"Well, Mr. Lynch, I ain't no liar. Anybody ask me questions, why, I gonna tellin' right, that's all."

I didn't know whether to hit him or kick him first. Tommy seemed to feel that he was in some danger of one or the other, for he drew back in alarm. "You better look out, Mr. Lynch!" he warned, "I sickin' my dog on you."

What was the use? I let him back away from me and set off for his cabin, the dog walking sideways and growling offensively over his shoulder. Tommy was only a simple-minded savage and probably didn't even realize how crooked and deceitful he had been. I was an officer and white man. I had to set him a good example by ignoring his cussedness. And at least, I reflected, Malcolm Fraser was a bigger fool than I had been; much bigger. It looked as though he might still be obliged to use his influence in my behalf. I would insist on it and Malcolm could be practically blackmailed by the threat of the fine joke I had on him.

Halliday's face disappointed me when I entered the Captain's old office. He was sitting in the

swivel chair in front of the wide flat desk gazing out at the Athabasca. I had expected he would be crushed flat and maybe in tears, or else done with that and all red-faced and wanting to bite somebody. But instead, he looked up and gave me the outlines of a grin. About such a performance as that Greek kid must have put on when he pinched a live fox and hid it inside his shirt. The fox made a breakfast of the kid's belly, as Malcolm told it; and the kid never let on it was happening. Just smiled, Malcolm said, but I'll bet any good poker player could have told he was bluffing. That was the way Halliday looked. And he seemed cold in spite of a big fire roaring in the fireplace.

"Well, I've just heard the news: all of it. What do you think of yourself, now?" I meant to get him talking. Then if he failed to show any spirit I would ride him till he got mad enough to want vengeance. There was bound to be something the Captain had left uncovered and I'd want him to help me find it.

Halliday guessed he was all right. "I made a mistake, of course, and I shall have to suffer for it. Maybe it was meant to be. I don't know! I loved her, and I shall always love her. Always! Nothing can change that. I'll have the memory of her to carry with me. It and this business."

"How much did you pay the old buzzard for it?"

He said he had paid so much: a little more than he had in cash. A note had been given for that.

But he owned everything, stock, furs, building and good-will.

"Good-will?" I screeched. "You don't mean to say you allowed him to sell you good-will?"

The note had covered that item. In three months he expected to receive the last of a small inheritance coming to him. He would pay it off then.

I saw he was still in a trance so I did my best to jolt him out of it. I hand-picked everything I called the Captain and went over the thing step by step to show Halliday how he had bought not good-will but ill-will; I quoted Malcolm's yarn to make it clear that he had been flimflammed into buying a business that was only a bluff in the first place, to cover law-breaking, piracy, bribery, corruption, and general skullduggery. And I poured salt in his wounds by telling him flat that the girl had only been bait for the trap since Duncan never wanted her to marry him, and finally, that the old pest had to cut and run to save himself.

"That's where I want to fool him," I said. "If I can find anything at all that will stick, he can be stopped, easy as not and you'll get some satisfaction out of it too. I can wire Headquarters to stop the bank from paying on your check to him pending your complaint of misrepresentation and fraud. Get busy now and close up here and let's go.—Or I'll write a message and you go send it. I want to look around here some more. And by the way, did he say anything about his famous log-

book? I don't suppose he'd leave it, though."

Halliday presumed the book was there in the desk where the Captain said he would leave it. He hadn't looked. I insisted he do so and it was there all right, a big, flat, loose-leaf affair bound in leather and cloth. Halliday flipped open the front cover and there, written across the page was the legend: "The Log of a Cruise Ashore. Robert Bruce Duncan—Master."

"Just let me glance through there. Maybe I'll find what we want, if he was simple enough to keep a record of it." I reached for the book but Halliday swung round with the thing in his hands and backed away from me.

"See here, Constable, you're going too far! I've allowed you to go on abusing my friend, but it's got to stop there. When will you learn that your vulgar suspicions of him are groundless? You want everyone to be as prejudiced as yourself, to come to me with such fantastic stories about him and his business! If one listened to you he would doubt everything on earth. I'm sick of it! I know the truth about Captain Duncan and I know he has practically been driven to sacrificing his standing here by your persecutions. And I know why he had to leave suddenly: to avoid a lot of framed-up evidence you had prepared against him! Your ambitions have led you into some pretty dark ways, Constable, by the look of it. The whole scheme has been known to him, however, and he cheated you. And as far as this book is concerned, it be-

longs to me. I mean to protect it, too. Captain Duncan would have known that and expected me to, or he wouldn't have left it. He knew that regardless of what it contained, I would understand. You wouldn't appreciate that though. What do you care for friendship?"

Oh, he was mad enough now, but it was me he was down on. And some of his talk was almost dirty, too.

"Son," I said, "this hurts me worse than it does you. But I'm going to read that book, friend or no friend, if I have to sit on you while I do it. So cut out the talk and hand it over!"

"Indeed I shan't! What sort of beast do you think I am?"

"You're no beast," I said. "You're a damn rabbit, so far as I can see. Give us the book and shut up."

I saw he wasn't going to do it so I rushed him. I had no intention of hurting him at all, only to let him see that I was serious. But instead of drawing back he leaped toward me and ducked under my arm. Before I realized his intention he had crossed the room and flung the book into the fireplace. I could have saved it even then, only Hallyday snatched up a hand-axe that lay there and stopped me. The power of the human eye has been exaggerated. I walked straight up, looking him in the eye, and telling him to drop it. And I came near getting my hair parted when he made a pass at me.

He didn't care what I did, he said. He would strike me if necessary rather than submit to such an outrage. Something at least was going to be kept sacred from my petty suspicions and malicious prying. He only regretted now that he had wasted the time trying to bring me to see something finer and better in life than the little empty authority I had. Mine was only a Policeman's attitude, ready to accuse everyone of deception and treachery. Thank God he had found one friend out there, one man able to see beneath the surface of things and place his confidence accordingly. And that trust was not going to be betrayed even to save himself.

The book was valuable to him—it would have been a text for him to follow in his new business. But better to lose it at ten times the cost than to break faith with one who had sought to befriend him.

There was more of it; he became a stalwart knight in cast-iron clothes, holding back the forces of evil and oppression at the door or the castle. His voice swelled and he got an inch or two taller in telling me that I was the fool: that I should have known he would meet his test in such a way.

I told him to dry up and let it burn for all I cared and turned away from him to look into the fire.

The book had landed on its back and fallen open across the blaze so that part of its leaves were spread each way. It had seemed a good while since

he pitched it there, but the flames were just curling over the edge of its stout covers, blackening the leaves and lifting them in the draft one by one.

I heard a funny sound from Halliday as the last of them had raised itself to the flame, exposed for a moment and then carried away. He was a stranger when I glanced at him. All the fierce manly pride had oozed out of him, and a desolate, forlorn expression had laid hold of his face as he stared. As if every good thing he had known was suddenly proven false. The axe fell from his hand and he closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again tears hung on their lids and finally rolled down his cheeks. With a sound that was mostly a sob he pointed to the charred mass that was to have been a book of revelations to him.

Every last page of it was blank.

And what of Wapoose when hunger and deathly cold have claimed the land? Wapoose, he is only a rabbit; there is thin and bitter bark on the poplar tree.

THE END

